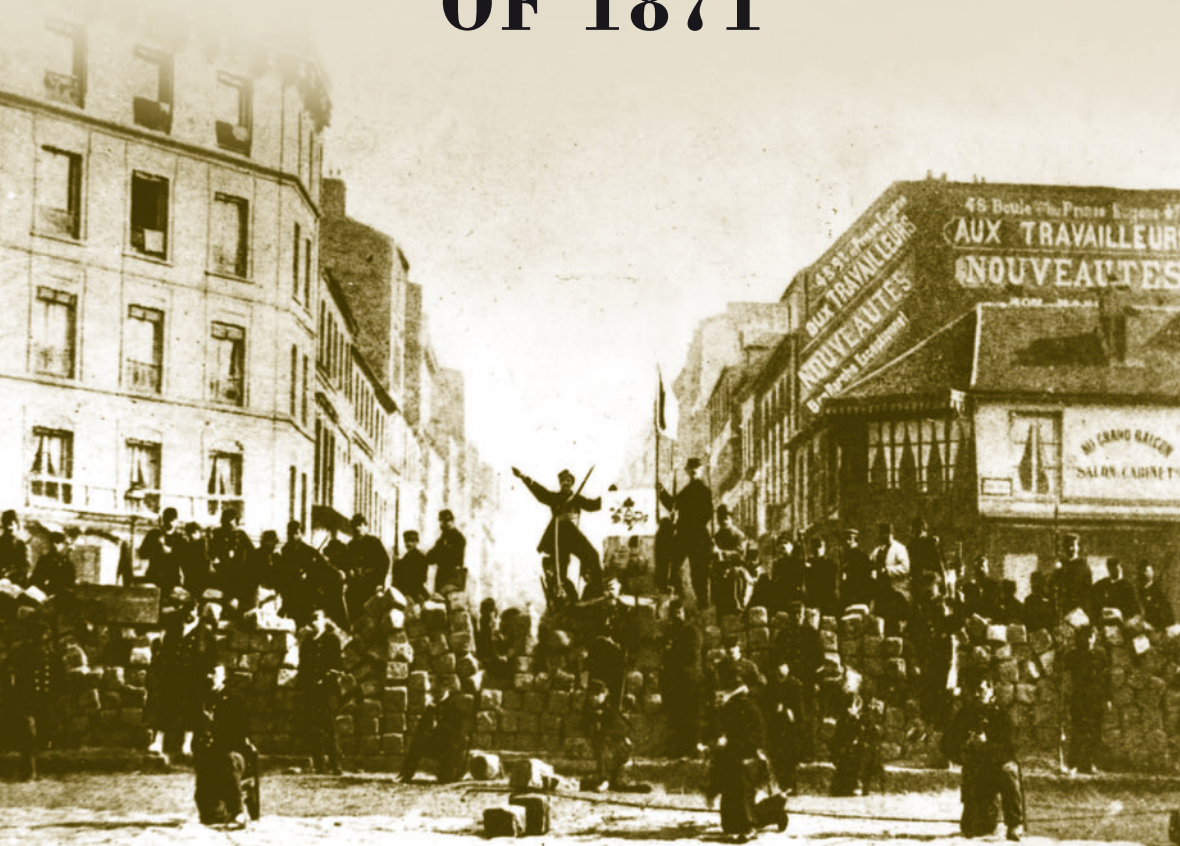


JOHN MERRIMAN

MASSACRE

THE LIFE AND DEATH
OF THE PARIS COMMUNE
OF 1871



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THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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For Don Lamm

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Acknowledgements

AS LONG AS I REMEMBER, I HAVE BEEN FASCINATED BY THE PARIS Commune of 1871. My previous book was a study that focused on Émile Henry, a young intellectual and anarchist who threw a bomb into the Café Terminus near the Gare Saint-Lazare in the French capital in February 1894. His goal was to kill as many people as possible. Henry's targets were ordinary bourgeois having a beer and listening to music before they returned home. My argument was that Henry's bomb represented the origins of modern terrorism. But there was a subtext: that of state terrorism. The French state, like that of Italy and Spain, used the fear of anarchists – and most anarchists were not terrorists at all – to repress political opponents. Émile Henry was the son of a militant in the Paris Commune of 1871, condemned to death in absentia by the French provisional government of Adolphe Thiers. Fortuné Henry had seen state terrorism up close. Soldiers fighting for the government of Versailles gunned down or executed thousands of ordinary people.

About six or seven years ago, the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris organised an exposition of photos taken during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 (in which Prussia and its other German allies crushed the Second Empire of Napoleon III) and during the Commune. One of these photos stuck in my mind: that of elegant upper-class Parisians returning to the French capital after their armies had crushed the Paris Commune during Bloody Week, 21–28 May 1871. They applauded the terror organised by the French state, which had crushed Parisians who wanted to be free.

One day, while walking to my office in Branford College at Yale, I decided to research and write a book about the life and death of the Paris

Commune, focusing on the representative experiences of Communards, but also some of those who opposed them.

The MacMillan Center and the Whitney Griswold Fund at Yale University offered research support for this book. Bertrand Fonck, with whom Caroline Piketty put me in touch, made it possible for me access dossiers in the Archives de la Défense in Vincennes when they were otherwise unavailable.

Writing about the Paris Commune of 1871, I have benefited greatly from the important studies of Laure Godineau, Éric Fournier, Carolyn Eichner, David Shafer, Gay Gullickson, Quentin Deleurmoz, Marc César and Stewart Edwards. I have long admired and in particular learned from the superb scholarship of Robert Tombs and Jacques Rougerie, essential for anyone interested in the Commune. Tom Kselman, Colin Foss and Joe Peterson also offered suggestions drawn from their knowledge of the period. Thanks also to someone I have never met, Olivier Marion, whose fine unpublished *mémoire de maîtrise* on the Catholic Church during the Commune (available in the Archives Départementales des Hauts-de-Seine) merits wider exposure. In Fayl-Billot, Haute-Marne, where Archbishop Georges Darboy was born, I would like to thank Philippe Robert, until recently *curé* of that parish, and Jean-Remy Compain.

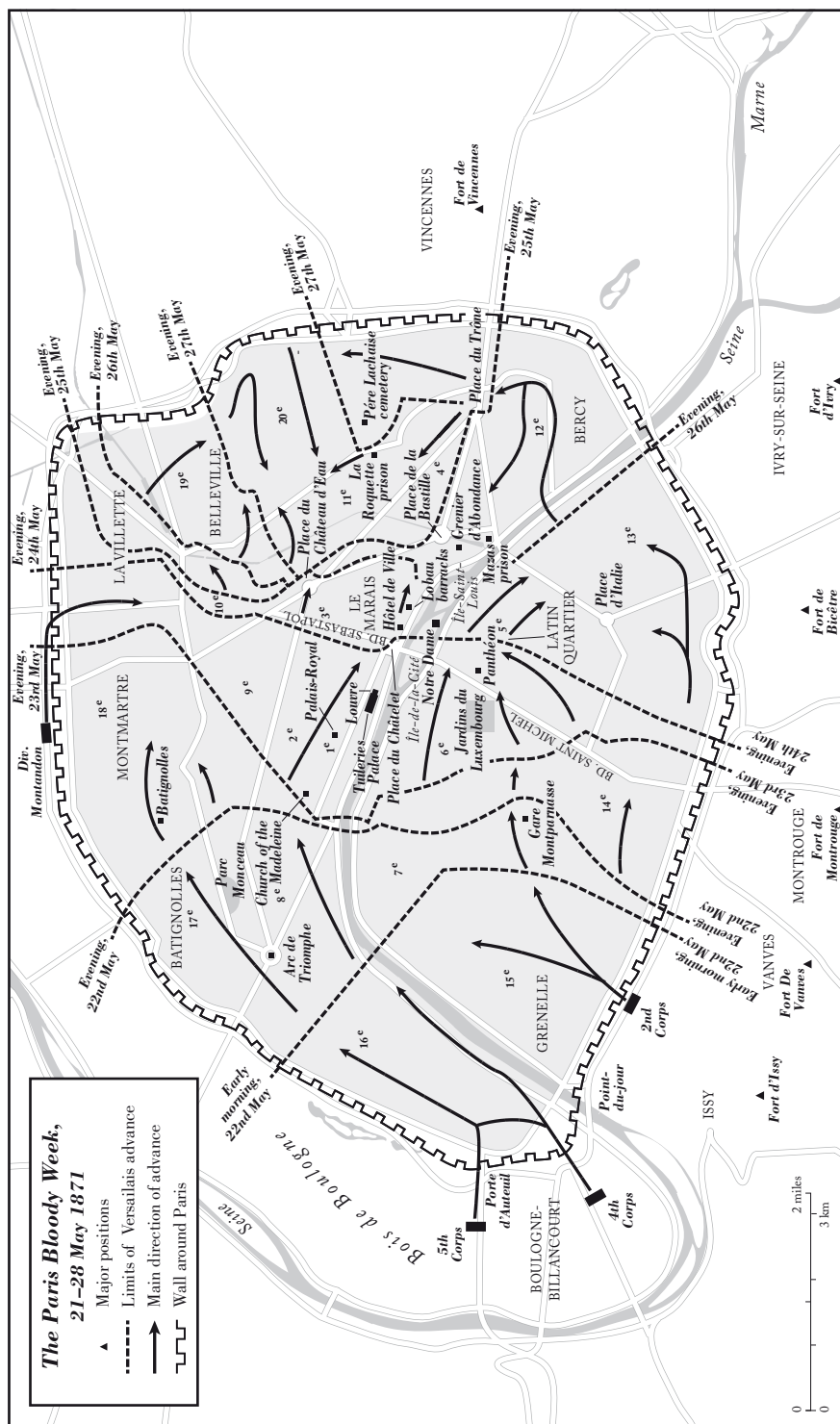
I was incredibly fortunate at the University of Michigan to have had the chance to study with Charles Tilly, who directed my dissertation long ago, and to have had him as a friend. As is the case of so many people in many fields, Chuck's death in 2008 remains an enormous loss. *Pour leur amitié et la manière dont ils ont inspiré mes travaux, je tiens à remercier chaleureusement* Michelle Perrot, Alain Corbin, Jean-François Chanut, Dominique Kalifa, Sylvain Venayre, Maurice Garden and Yves Lequin. If the research for this book took place in Paris, most of it was written in Balazuc (Ardèche). There I am fortunate to have as friends Lucien and Catherine Mollier, Hervé and Françoise Parain, Eric Fruleux and Mathieu Fruleux. Thanks also there to William Clavaroyet of 'La Fenièrre' and Lionel Pélerin of 'Chez Paulette', and to Paulette Balazuc. In Poland, where I have had the pleasure of spending a great amount of time over the past eight years, thanks to Andrzej Kamiński, Wojciech Falkowski, Krzysztof Łazarski, Adam Kozuchowski and Eulalia Łazarska, as well as Jim Collins; in Rouen, to Jean Sion; in Paris, to Jean-Claude Petilon and Sven Wanegffelen; in the United States, to Bruno and Flora Cabanes, Charles Keith, Mark Lawrence, Gene Tempest, Joe Malloure, Jim Read, Steve Shirley, Gil Joseph, Dick and Sandy Simon, Mike Johnson, Steve Pincus, Sue Stokes and Peter Gay. Our family owes Victoria Johnson so much.

Peter McPhee and I have been talking about French history and much more since we first met in 1974 – *ça passe vite, le temps*. He read the first draft of this book and offered his usual extremely helpful comments. At the Fletcher Company, I am indebted to Christy Fletcher and Melissa Chincillo, and to Donald Lamm, who has supported this project from the beginning. Again, Don contributed his unparalleled editing skills to one of my books. Melissa, with the assistance of Anne van den Heuvel, obtained the publication rights for the images in the book, greatly helping out in a complex eleventh hour. At Yale University Press, London, many thanks to Robert Baldock, director, and to Rachael Lonsdale, editor, for their encouragement and good cheer.

Laura Merriman has spent much of her life in France, in Balazuc, but is often in Paris, where this tragic story took place. Chris Merriman first arrived in Balazuc at the age of ten days, and was able to spend years in school in France, and thus also knows Paris very well. My spouse Carol Merriman contributed her editing skills to this book and has brought so much happiness into my life, including Laura and Chris.

Donald and Jean Lamm have been our friends for decades. Don has always represented the very best in publishing. This book is dedicated to him in gratitude and friendship and with great admiration.

Balazuc, 7 June 2014





1 The Army of Versailles battling Communard resisters on place de la Concorde, 22 May 1871, by Gustave Boulanger.



2 Communard cannons and fighters protecting the ramparts of Paris.



3 Cannons and a barricade erected by the Communards on Porte Saint-Ouen defend the Commune.



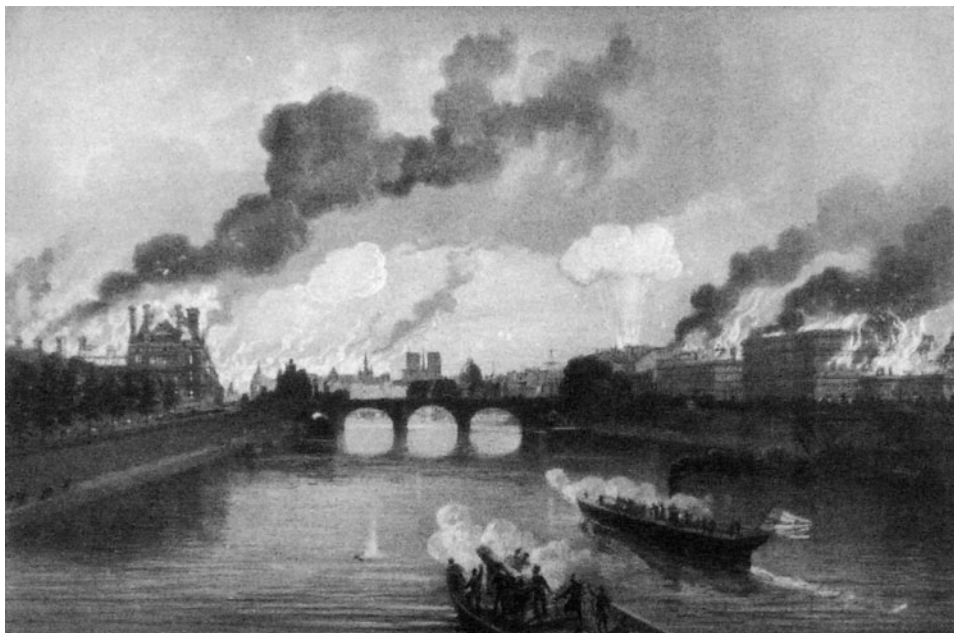
4 A massive Communard barricade temporarily protects rue de Castiglione.



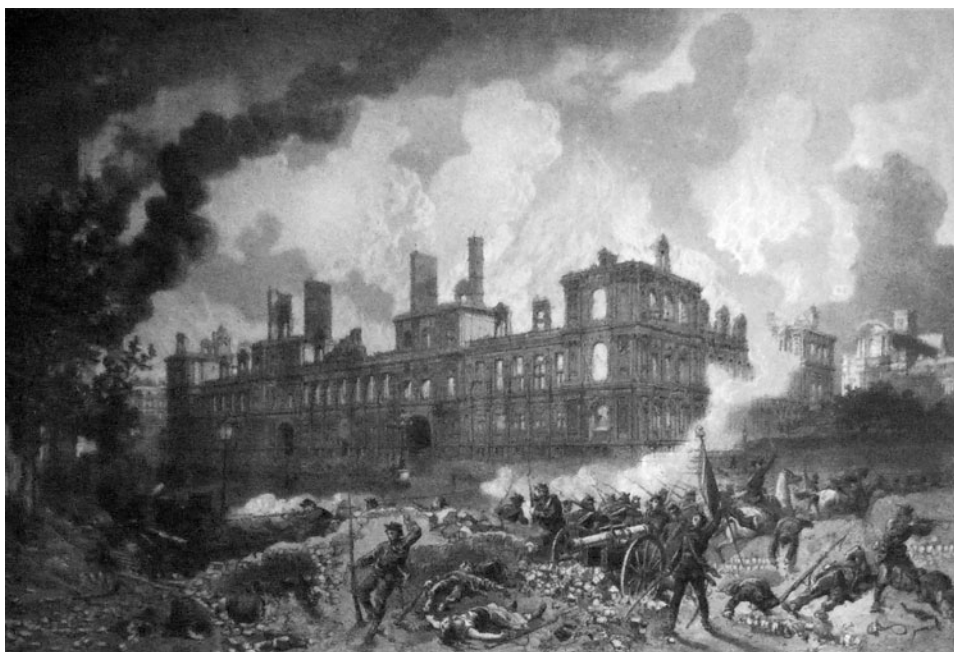
5 'Summary executions in Paris – Shooting Down Communist Prisoners': *Harper's Weekly* depicts the execution of communist (sic) prisoners by Versailles troops after the fall of the Commune.



6 The corpses of anonymous Communards executed by the Versailles army.



7 Paris aflame, seen from the Solferino bridge, 24 May 1871.



8 The Hôtel de Ville burns in Paris, 24 May 1871.

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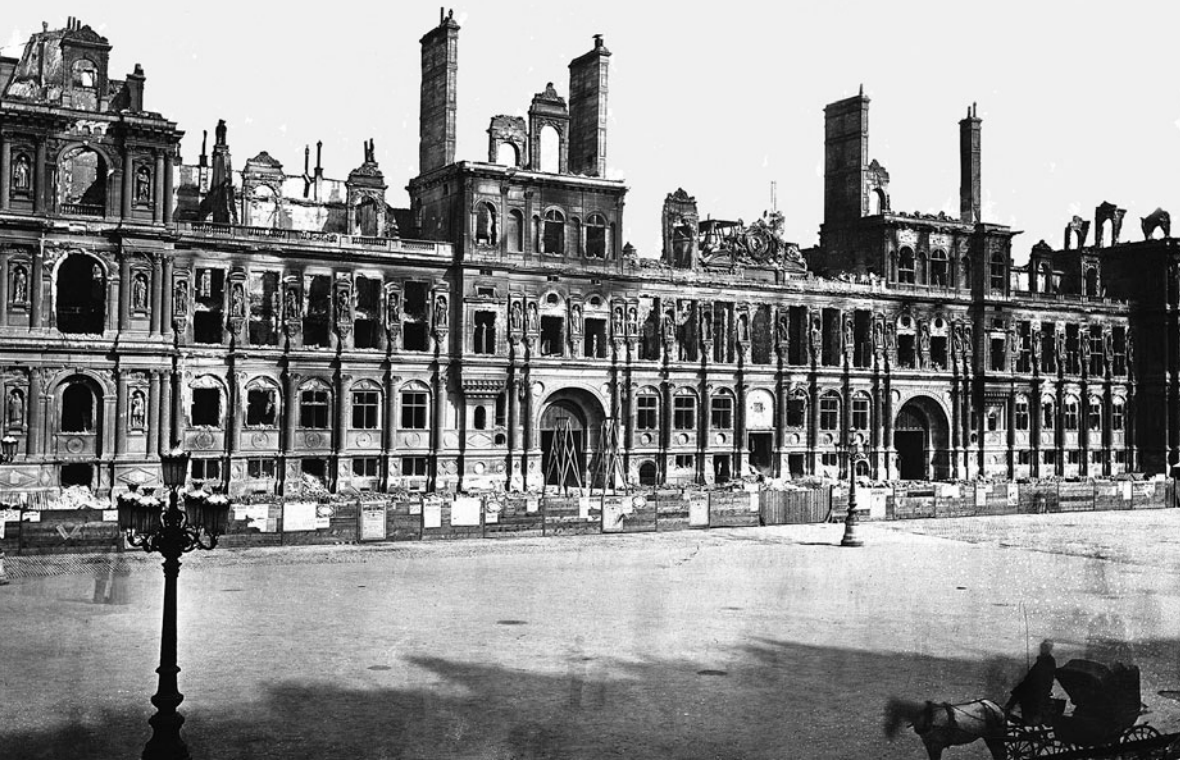


THE END OF THE COMMUNE—EXECUTION OF A PETROLEUSE

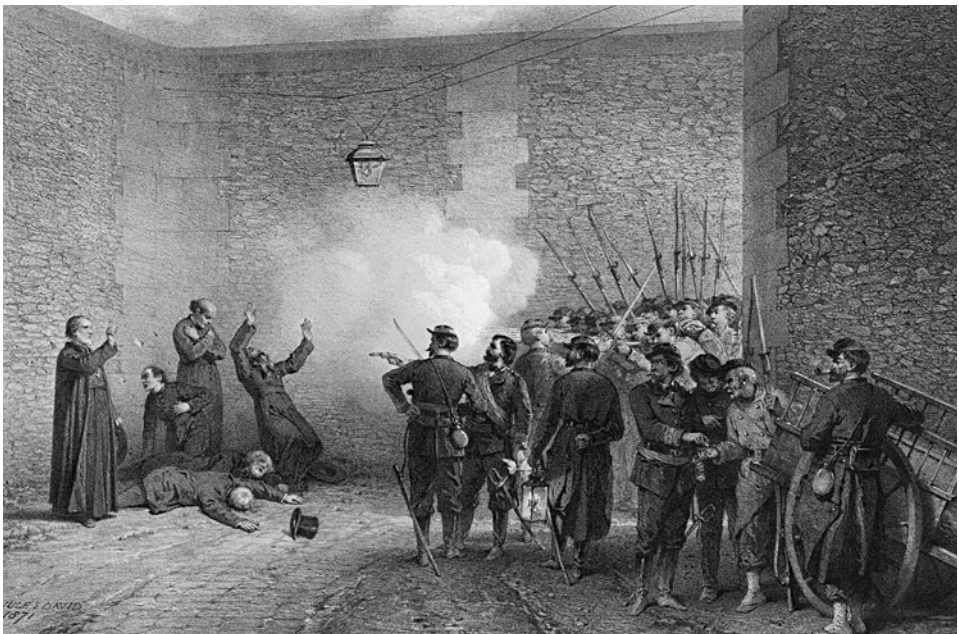
9 A woman accused of being a *pétroleuse* (female incendiary) is executed by the Versailles.



10 Buildings burning on rue de Rivoli, 24 May 1871.



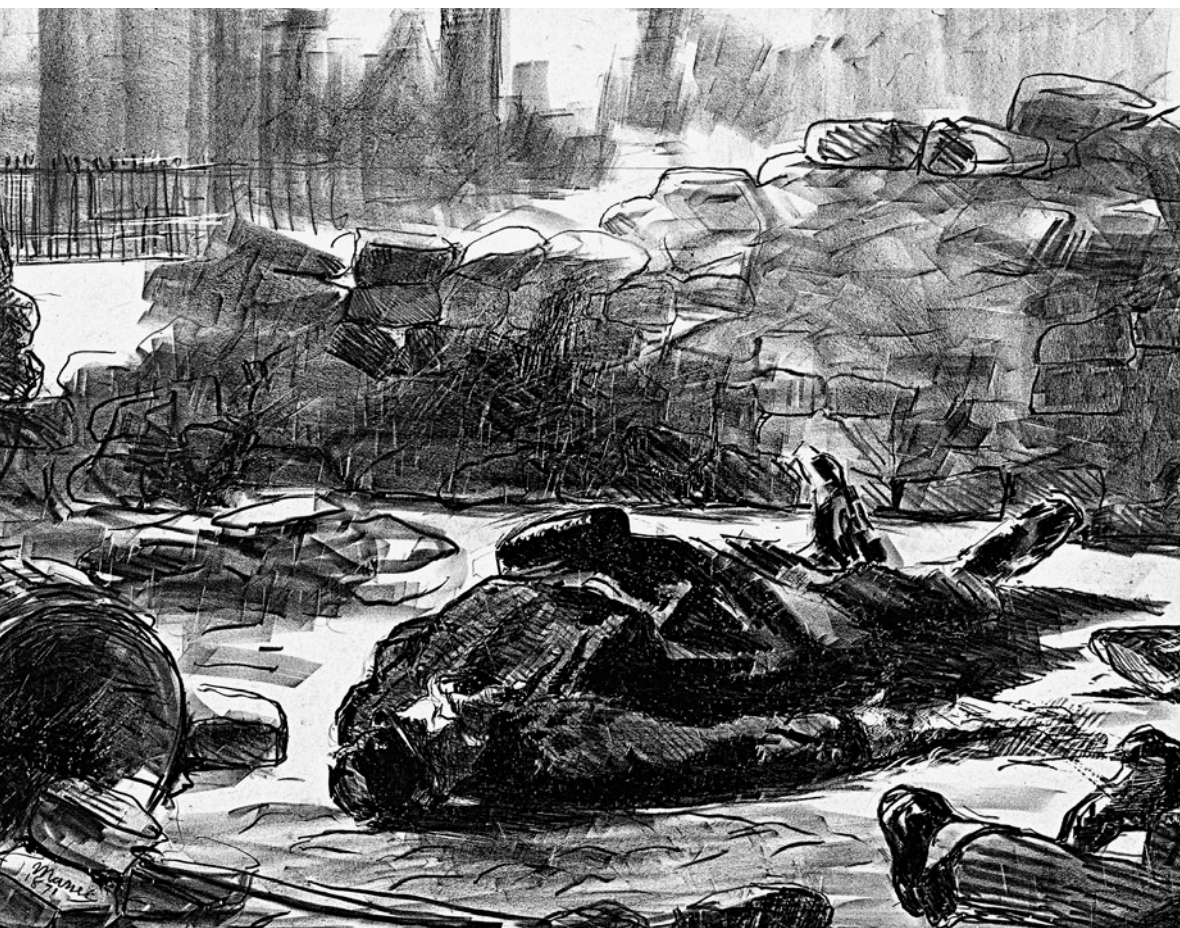
11 The Hôtel de Ville after the fire of 24 May 1871.



12 Execution of Archbishop Georges Darboy and five other hostages at La Roquette prison, 24 May 1871.



13 Elegant Parisians return to their city, much of which had been left in ruins by the fighting and the cannons of the Versaillais.



14 Édouard Manet's 'Civil War', 1871.

Prologue

ON 18 MARCH 1871, PARISIANS LIVING ON MONTMARTRE AWAKENED to the sounds of French troops attempting to seize the cannons of the National Guard. The troops were under the orders of Adolphe Thiers, the conservative head of a provisional government recently ensconced in Versailles, once the residence of the Bourbon monarchs of the Ancien Régime. Thiers, fearing the mobilisation of angry and radicalised Parisians, wanted to disarm Paris, and its National Guard. The ranks of the Guard were filled for the most part by workers who wanted a strong republic and were angered by the capitulation of the provisional government in the disastrous war against Prussia that had begun the previous July and brought about the fall of the Second Empire.

Despite the efforts of the French army, the men and women of Montmartre, Belleville and Buttes-Chaumont courageously prevented the troops from taking the cannons. Seeing the arrival of some 4,000 soldiers on Montmartre, who halted to await the horses necessary to haul the weapons down the hill, women sounded the alarm. Working-class residents of the butte overlooking the French capital prevented the heavily armed troops from hitching the cannons to the horses and began to build barricades, that traditional act of revolutionary defiance. Soldiers began to fraternise with the people of Montmartre. The 6,000 troops sent to Belleville, La Villette and Ménilmontant fared no better. Parisians would keep their cannons.

Thwarted, Thiers withdrew his forces from Paris to Versailles, where he planned to regroup and eventually retake the city. Thousands of wealthy Parisians joined him there. In Paris, meanwhile, left-wing militants proclaimed a 'Commune' of progressive self-government that brought

freedom to Parisians, many of whom believed themselves ‘masters of their own lives’ for the first time. Working-class families from proletarian neighbourhoods proudly strolled into the *beaux quartiers* of the capital, imagining a more just society, and prepared to take steps to make that a reality. Their progressive Commune would last a mere ten weeks before it was annihilated during the last bloody week of May.

The birth and destruction of the Paris Commune, one of the most tragic, defining events of the nineteenth century, still resonates today. In the streets of Paris, Thiers’s army gunned down thousands of ordinary men, women and, occasionally, children. Soldiers executed many for their participation in the defence of the Commune; others died because their workers’ attire, remnants of a Parisian National Guard uniform, or simply their occupation or manner of speaking marked them for death. The massacres carried out by French troops against their own countrymen anticipated the demons of the century to follow. You could be gunned down because of who you were, because you wanted to be free. This may have been the ultimate significance of Bloody Week, 21–28 May 1871, the biggest massacre in Europe of the nineteenth century. The life and death of the Paris Commune still resonates today.

Paris was a surging city of great social contrasts and contradictions during Napoleon III’s Second Empire (1852–1870). On one hand, the capital led a rapidly growing French economy. Industry continued to be dominated by artisans in small workshops who produced the *articles de Paris*, high-quality gloves and other luxury goods that came to symbolise French manufacturing. Imperial financial institutions helped boost industrial production in and around Paris, bringing unparalleled prosperity to people of means. They attended lavish imperial social events and theatrical performances, traversing the city and the Bois-de-Boulogne in carriages while ordinary people walked to work. Powerful trains, their engines spewing steam, carried wealthy passengers from the burgeoning capital to Deauville and other increasingly elegant towns on the Norman coast.

The economic boom and the incredible wealth it brought to Paris diverted attention from widespread poverty and divisions in the city. Napoleon III and Baron Georges Haussmann ploughed spacious boulevards through the tangle of medieval Paris. Fancy restaurants and cafés welcomed those who could afford them. In the dilapidated and overcrowded districts of eastern and northern Paris, working people living in miserable tiny apartments or rooming houses struggled to get by. For them, hard times never seemed to go away.

By the late 1860s, Napoleon III faced mounting political opposition, so much so that many Parisians anticipated a disastrous end to his reign. France already had a lengthy history of class strife. Three revolutions had chased monarchs from the throne of France in the past sixty years. So far, none had brought to France the stability one could find across the English Channel in Great Britain.

Napoleon III, however, was confident that he, unlike his immediate predecessors, was destined to hold onto power. Born in 1808, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was the son of Napoleon's brother and had been raised in a chateau in Switzerland amid artefacts of his uncle's rule. He was certain that his future role would be to build upon his famous family's dynastic heritage. Identifying his family with the fate of France, to his ambition he added a shrewd sense of political opportunism which he combined with notoriously bad judgement. The July Monarchy of King Louis Philippe of the Orléans family (a junior wing of the Bourbons, the French royal family) maintained its policy of forcing the family of Napoleon Bonaparte to remain in exile. He had attempted to invade France with a handful of followers in 1836, when he marched into a Strasbourg garrison and was arrested, and again four years later, when he landed on the coast near Boulogne-sur-Mer, with the same embarrassing result. In 1840, he was imprisoned in northern France, from which he escaped in 1846 dressed as a worker. These fiascos helped lend Napoleon's nephew the reputation of being something of a buffoon who surrounded himself with sleazy, inept cronies. Short and increasingly corpulent, he resembled his uncle – with whom his enemies compared him, calling him 'the [Napoleonic] hat without the head', and poking fun at his 'fish eyes'.

Yet for all his early failures, Louis Napoleon was surprisingly optimistic and believed that economic progress under his rule could benefit all Parisians, wealthy and poor alike. With his usual modesty he wrote from prison 'I believe that there are certain men who are born to serve as a means for the march of the human race . . . I consider myself to be one of these.'¹

The February Revolution in 1848, one of the many revolutions that swept Europe that year, brought an end to the Orléans monarchy, and Louis Napoleon quickly returned to Paris. He was elected president of the Second French Republic in December 1848, nine months after King Louis-Philippe was overthrown. After orchestrating the repression of the left, the 'prince president' ended the Second French Republic with a coup d'état on 2 December 1851 because his term as president would have come to an end the following year. Parisians awoke to martial law, with

democratic-socialist members of the National Assembly, whose members were elected from the *départements*, under arrest.

But some Parisians were not willing to submit to another empire without a fight. Louis Napoleon's coup d'état sparked an ill-fated uprising in working-class neighbourhoods in central and eastern Paris. More than 125,000 people, the majority of them *paysans*, took up arms to defend the Republic, particularly in the south, where secret societies had built networks of underground support. But the insurgents had no chance against columns of professional soldiers and were soon fleeing for their lives. In a precursor to the aftermath of the Commune in 1871, almost 27,000 people – whether they had participated in the revolt or not – were brought before courts-martial, or 'Mixed Commissions', consisting of senior military officers and judicial and administrative officials. Thousands of people were convicted, receiving sentences ranging from deportation to Algeria or even Cayenne, to imprisonment in France or exile from the region where they lived. The following year Napoleon III declared the Second Empire.²

The Emperor found his Bonapartist following among wealthy men who had supported Louis-Philippe in the name of social 'order' during the Orléanist July Monarchy that ruled between 1830 and 1848.³ The financial system under Napoleon III was also set up to enrich those already in power. Napoleon III's family received a million francs (roughly £1.8 million) from the treasury each year. Random relatives also received large sums from the state for simply existing. Moreover, millions of francs in special funds went into the Emperor's large pockets; an English mistress received a hefty sum as well. But not everyone was pleased with the new Emperor. As the rich became even richer, many people in Paris and in the provinces continued to struggle and had contempt for '*Napoléon le petit*', as Victor Hugo dubbed him. Workers had no legal recourse against their employers, who were backed by gendarmes and troops.

In fact, an increasing number of Parisians fell into the latter camp and benefitted not at all from Napoleon III's regime. The population of Paris almost doubled during the 1850s and 1860s, rising from a little more than 1 million in 1851 to almost 2 million people by 1870. Each year during the Second Empire tens of thousands of immigrants poured into the capital from the Parisian basin, the north, Picardie, Normandy, Champagne and Lorraine, among other regions, mostly male labourers even poorer than the Parisians already there, attracted by the possibility of construction work. These new residents, many of whom had left precarious economic situations in the rural world, accounted for virtually all of this rapid urban growth. Many were under-employed, if not unemployed, and crowded

into *garnis* – rooming houses – on the narrow, grey streets in the central districts or in virtual shacks in the emerging industrial suburbs. The central *arrondissements*, always densely packed, reached an astonishing 15,000 people per square kilometre in the Fourth Arrondissement in Le Marais, where population density was three times today's. Tens of thousands were indigent, dependent at least to some extent on charity. Some simply slept wherever they could. In 1870, almost half a million Parisians – one quarter of the population – could be found classified as indigent.⁴

As the deterioration of the old medieval centre of Paris became more pronounced, elites became more frantic about 'the urban crisis'. On Ile-de-la-Cité, most artisans had moved away, leaving about 15,000 men, most day-labourers, crammed into the island's rooming houses. Notre Dame towered over these small, jam-packed buildings. A police report had noted the presence of 'an enormous number of down-and-out people, men and women, who survive only through plunder and who find refuge only in the bars and brothels that pollute the *quartier*'. On the Right Bank, much of the First Arrondissement, centring on the great market of Les Halles, Le Marais, including the Third and Fourth Arrondissements, and, to the north, the Eleventh and Twelfth Arrondissements reflected the grim texture of urban life. A good part of the Fifth Arrondissement on the Left Bank, with its many scrap metal and cloth sellers, was also very poor. The miserable, disease-ridden faubourg Saint-Marceau, one of the poorest parts of Paris, reached into the Thirteenth Arrondissement, where rag-pickers plied their trade and tanners tossed animal remains into the Bièvre River.⁵

Central and eastern Paris formed, according to one observer, 'a gothic city, black, gloomy, excrement- and fever-ridden, a place of darkness, disorder, violence, black, misery, and blood'. Horrible smells emanated from 'appalling alleys, houses the colour of mud' and from stagnant, putrid waters. Paris, like other large cities, was an unhealthy place where every year more people died than were born. Only about a fifth of the buildings had running water. Keeping out freezing winters was a perpetual challenge. People of relative ease living in the *beaux quartiers* of western Paris felt they resided uncomfortably in a sordid capital of immorality and vice, its dark, dank *quartiers* the preserve of the 'dangerous and labouring classes', even if most people of means had never actually seen these neighbourhoods. Popular literature helped firmly place this image in the upper-class imagination, depicting poor neighbourhoods of Paris as the haunts of 'the dregs of society'.⁶

To accommodate the exponential growth in Paris's population and limit the deterioration of the city centre, in 1853 Napoleon III summoned

Baron Georges Haussmann, prefect of the *département* of the Seine, to plan the rebuilding of Paris. Of Alsatian origins, Haussmann had been born in the capital. After completing law school he moved into the bureaucracy, serving as a sub-prefect and then prefect in several provincial *départements*, where, during the Second Republic, he lent his administrative skills to political repression. An energetic man with a talent for organisation, Haussmann seemed the perfect Parisian bureaucrat, and was eager to use the emerging field of statistics to his advantage in launching his great project. But the elegantly dressed Haussmann was also an arrogant, vain and aggressive bully willing to do anything in his power to ensure that France would never again be a republic.⁷

In many ways, then, Haussmann was the ideal man to realise Napoleon's dream of rebuilding the French capital into an imperial city. The Emperor and the prefect of the Seine had three goals. The first was to bring more light and air into a city ravaged by cholera in 1832 and 1849 (and again in 1853–54, after Haussmann's grand projects had begun), while building more sewers to improve the city's sanitation. Second, they wanted to free the flow of capital and goods. The first French department stores – Bon Marché, Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville, Le Printemps, Le Louvre and La Samaritaine – would stand on Haussmann's wide boulevards, along with glittering *brasseries* and *cafés*, which became the face of modern Paris, although small shops remained essential to the urban economy.⁸

Third, the Emperor and his prefect wanted to limit the possibilities of insurgency in traditional revolutionary neighbourhoods. The boulevards themselves would become an obstacle to the construction of barricades by virtue of their width. On eight occasions since 1827 disgruntled Parisians had built barricades in the city, most recently during the February Revolution and then during June Days of 1848, when workers rose up to protest against the closing of National Workshops that had provided some employment in a time of economic distress. Barricades went up again in Paris following Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's coup d'état. Then, protestors managed to block the advance of professional armies of the state by hurriedly constructing barricades on the narrow streets of central and eastern Paris, using wood, cobblestones, and just about anything else that could be found. Napoleon III had no intention of letting that happen again.⁹

Haussmann's boulevards reflected the determination of the leaders of the Second Empire to impose their version of social order on Paris. The prefect of the Seine did not mince words: 'Bringing order to this Queen City is one of the first conditions of general security.' Some of the boulevards indeed tore right through the insurgent *quartiers* of the June Days.

The boulevard Prince Eugène provided troops with relatively easy access into 'the habitual centre . . . of riots'.¹⁰

The new boulevards of Paris thus embodied the 'imperialism of the straight line', intended not only to quash uprisings but also to display the modernity and might of the empire. They provided power alleys down which troops could march in showy processions, as had been the case in earlier examples of classical urban planning from Philip II's Madrid to Peter the Great's St Petersburg and Frederick the Great's Berlin. The rue de Rivoli, completed in 1855, led visitors to the international exposition on the Champs-Élysées, which featured 5,000 exhibits, many celebrating the city's technological innovations. The 'capital of the world' had emerged as a spectacular 'permanent exposition', or what novelist Théophile Gautier called 'A Babel of industry . . . A Babylon of the future'.¹¹

The National Assembly provided funds for the enormous series of projects, augmented by a tax on goods brought into the city, assessed at the customs barriers (*octrois*) that ringed Paris. But, as costs soared, Baron Haussmann found ways of resourcefully raising money in addition to taxes, working around the Corps Législatif to do so. He demanded capital outlays from contractors who would in principle be paid with interest once their work was done. Haussmann then turned to issuing 'proxy bonds', backed by funds now owed by these contractors. The imperial rebuilding of Paris left the capital with a debt of 2.5 billion francs. By the late 1860s, the prefect of the Seine had raised 500 million francs. The Emperor was well aware of Haussmann's financial machinations, but remained committed to his grand plans for Paris, which would continue to create jobs and build the prestige of his empire.¹² Yet, the financing strategy was rather like a balloon mortgage that could burst at any time.

The rebuilding of Paris also entailed the destruction of 100,000 apartments in 20,000 buildings. The 'Haussmannisation' of Paris sent many Parisians packing for the urban periphery because they had been pushed out of rented apartments, their homes had been destroyed, or prices had skyrocketed in a city that was already extremely expensive. In some places in the central *arrondissements*, such as Ile-de-la-Cité, the population actually fell as people moved toward the periphery. About 20–30 per cent of the Parisian population moved, most into nearby or neighbouring *quartiers*, but also into the inner suburbs. These were annexed to Paris on 1 January 1860 for the purposes of increasing tax revenue, but also to make it easier for the government to police this restive periphery. Newcomers from the provinces had also moved to the inner suburbs, particularly Montmartre in the Eighteenth Arrondissement, La Villette in the Nineteenth, and

Belleville in the Twentieth. These districts became the residences, temporary or permanent, of an increasingly large number of poor workers, as did the growing suburbs beyond the walls of Paris.¹³

Rather than staving off class strife, however, the rebuilding of Paris only accentuated the contrast between the more prosperous western *arrondissements* and the poor eastern and north-eastern *quartiers*, the so-called 'People's Paris'. The flowering of western Paris had begun a half-century ago, as businesses and banks were established there. One could also find arcades and passageways of glass and metal – 'veritable gallery-streets' – whose shops anticipated the new department stores. But under Napoleon III the bourgeoisie's day had truly arrived.

In the Ninth Arrondissement, for example, the *quartier* of Chaussée d'Antin, the centre of what Balzac described as 'the world of money', became a residence for the kings of finance and their ladies. The residence or *hôtel* of the Guimard family, which had been built in 1772, was converted into a store selling the newest in consumer novelties. Nearby stood another elegant residence that became the headquarters of one of the railway companies whose trains were slowly transforming France. The Grand Hôtel and its Café-de-la-Paix was built on boulevard Capucines a few steps from Charles Garnier's new Opera, construction of which began in 1861. When Empress Eugénie asked the Parisian-born architect what would be the style of the new Opera, he supposedly replied without the slightest hesitation 'pure Napoleon III'.¹⁴ On place Saint-Georges stood the sizable residence of Adolphe Thiers, who packed his mansion with *objets d'art* from around the world.

Nearby, the Champs-Élysées and the Eighth Arrondissement on the western edge of Paris also flaunted the privileges granted by wealth. Carriages and horses carried the rich out to the Bois-de-Boulogne, where '*tout Paris*' could frolic. Magnificent private residences lined the avenue. Nearby stood elegant *cirques* (circuses), such as the Jardin d'Hiver, café-concerts (where revellers could go to drink and listen to live music), and restaurants. A lavish private residence had been purchased by the mother of Empress Eugénie, who of course would not allow her mother to live just anywhere. The Champs-Élysées fit the bill.¹⁵

On the other side of the Seine, the boulevard Saint-Germain, partially completed in 1855, paralleled the river. As it cut through the Seventh and Sixth Arrondissements, the boulevard also sported private residences offering privacy and elegance, many dating from the eighteenth century. Across the street, the Café Flore set up shop late in the Second Empire, bringing together, then as now, a clientele with money to spend.

*

A world away from the opulence of western Paris, although not far in distance, rue de la Goutte d'Or bisected a proletarian neighbourhood. In his *L'Assommoir*, Émile Zola described Gervaise – a character who would ultimately drink herself to death – as she looked up at number 22:

On the street side it had five floors, each one with fifteen windows in a line, the lack of shutters of which, with their broken slats, gave the huge wall-space a look of utter desolation. But below that there were four shops on the ground floor: to the right of the doorway a huge sleazy eating-house, to the left a coal merchant's, a draper's and an umbrella shop. The building looked all the more colossal because it stood between two low rickety houses clinging to either side of it . . . Its unplastered sides, mud-coloured and as interminably bare as prison walls, showed rows of toothings-stones [stone links projecting from the end of a building so that more could be quickly added and linked up] like decaying jaws snapping in the void.¹⁶

Like Gervaise, many working-class Parisians began to feel alienated from the city they loved amid the dramatic and devastating changes orchestrated by Haussmann in the interests of the upper classes.¹⁷ Indeed, this sense of not belonging arguably contributed to an emerging sense of solidarity among those living on the margins of the capital. And, even as western Paris was being transformed into a gleaming city of wide boulevards and lavish apartments, eastern and northern Paris and its periphery were being remade by ongoing industrialisation. The edge of the city offered more space, access to the railways and canals of northern Paris, and a labour force perched at its gates (where the customs barriers could be found), making it an ideal location for manufacturing. Larger manufacturers were to be found in the inner suburbs (some of these factories predated the Second Empire) – those annexed in 1860 – including the Cail metallurgical factory in Grenelle, which employed about 2,800 workers. Entrepreneurs in the inner suburbs produced candles, soap, perfumes and sugar, bringing raw materials into northern Paris via the Ourcq Canal.

The populations in the industrialised parts of Paris shot up with the arrival of new factories. The population of the Twentieth Arrondissement, for instance, grew from 17,000 in 1800 to 87,000 in 1851 and continued to soar. Montmartre, which had only about 600 inhabitants in 1800, reached 23,000 in 1851 and 36,500 five years later. Chemical and metallurgical production transformed La Villette, which had risen from about

1,600 inhabitants fifty years earlier to more than 30,000 by 1860. Beyond the walls of Paris, the *arrondissement* of Saint-Denis grew from 41,000 in 1841 to an astounding 356,000 in 1856, as industries leap-frogged beyond the city.¹⁸

In 1834, a minister of Louis-Philippe had warned that the factories being built on the edge of Paris could 'be the cord that will strangle us one day'.¹⁹ During the Second Empire, the staggering population growth in Paris's working-class neighbourhoods accentuated the fear Parisian elites had of ordinary workers living on the geographic and social margins of their city. Belleville, a neighbourhood of nearly 60,000 people on the north-eastern edge of Paris, had been annexed to Paris along with the other inner suburbs. 'Belleville is coming down the hill!' became a compelling fear in the *beaux quartiers* below.²⁰

Louis Lazare, a royalist critic of the Second Empire and the rebuilding of Paris, argued that instead of dispensing millions of francs on the wealthier neighbourhoods, the money would have been far better spent on the 'dreadful Siberia' of the periphery. Lazare warned that 'around the Queen of Cities is rising up a formidable *cité ouvrière*'.²¹

Conservative Louis Veuillot shared a critique of Haussmannisation with republicans, who rejected the authoritarian structure of the empire and its privileged elite. The Catholic polemicist embraced the memory of old Paris destroyed by modernity, materialism, secularism and state centralisation. He saw the new boulevards as 'an overflowed river which would carry along the debris of a world'. Paris had become a 'city without a past, full of minds without memories, hearts without sorrows, souls without love! City of uprooted multitudes, shifting piles of human dust, you can grow to become the capital of the world, [but] you will never have citizens'.²²

Mounting opposition to Napoleon III's regime was also infused by anti-clericalism both in the ranks of middle-class radicals and the urban poor. The Catholic Church was extremely visible in the Paris of the Second Empire, yet the Church was increasingly absent from the lives of Parisian working families. If the Second Empire had seen a revival of fervent Catholicism in parts of France, particularly after the sighting of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes in 1856, Paris, other large cities, and regions like Limousin, Ile-de-France and large parts of the south-west had undergone 'de-Christianisation' – a decline in religious practice. In Ménilmontant, in the Twentieth Arrondissement, only 180 men out of a population of 33,000 performed their Easter duty, the obligation to receive Holy Communion. The situation of the Church was

even bleaker in the working-class suburbs.²³ This was perhaps unsurprising given that the Church told the poor that this world is a valley of tears and that they should resign themselves to poverty – their reward for suffering would come in Heaven.

Intellectual currents during the middle decades of the nineteenth century also challenged the Catholic Church's declared primacy of faith over reason. Positivism, based on the belief that rational inquiry and the application of science to the human condition were advancing society, was becoming more popular in universities across Europe. The papal *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), which denounced modern society, seemed to associate the Church with ignorance and a rejection of human progress. Popular literature, including works by Victor Hugo, George Sand and Eugène Sue, sometime presented the Catholic clergy in an unfavourable light. Anti-clericals believed French *paysans* to be under the thumb of the clergy, whispering instructions in confessionals.

If the parish clergy provided useful functions – baptisms, marriages and burials – the religious orders lived in isolated contemplation and prayer ('they eat, they sleep, they digest' went an old refrain). Moreover religious orders, particularly the Jesuits, were closely identified with the conservative political role of the Church, whose archbishops and bishops had supported Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's coup d'état.

Many Parisians in particular objected to the Church's dominant role in primary education. During the Second Empire, male religious orders rose in Paris from six to twenty-two for men and from twenty-two to an astonishing sixty-seven female orders. The number of men in religious orders increased from 3,100 in 1851 to well over 20,000 by 1870, and women from 34,200 to more than 100,000 in 1870. In 1871 52 per cent of Parisian pupils were in schools run by religious orders and staffed by teachers who were not required to take the examinations required of lay teachers. The Church's virtual monopoly over the education of girls stood out, and yet literacy remained lower among women than men.²⁴

The hardship facing the working poor also contributed to mounting opposition to the imperial regime. As prices raced ahead of wages and the gap between the wealthy and workers increased, workers found ways to combat these injustices. Although unions remained illegal (and would be so until 1884), the late 1860s brought the creation and toleration of more workers' associations, which were basically unions. This came at a time when employers, particularly in larger-scale industries, were waging war against the shop-floor autonomy of skilled workers by aggressively posting rules

and regulations, increasing mechanisation, and hiring more unskilled workers. In 1869, there were at least 165 workers' associations in Paris with some 160,000 members. Cooperative restaurants offering meals at reduced prices had more than 8,000 diners. Workers' associations began to organise producers' cooperatives (in which workers in a trade would own tools and raw materials, thus circumventing the existing wage system). The aims of these associations were political and even revolutionary, as well as economic. Indeed, many workers believed that the organisation of workers' associations would ultimately replace the very existence of states.²⁵

A number of Parisian women emerged as militants demanding rights and better working conditions. Countless women worked at home – many living in barely lit attics – in the putting-out system of textile work, an important part of large-scale industrialisation in France. Female workers earned about half as much as their male counterparts in workshops and factories. Yet calls for female suffrage were few and far between – the emphasis remained on economic issues and the struggles of working-class families and single women to survive. In a 'Manifesto' penned in July 1868, nineteen women demanded that a woman be given 'possession of the rights which belong to her as a human person'. A year later, female militants organised the Society for Affirming the Rights of Women. They advocated the right to divorce and published a plan for 'Democratic Primary School for Girls', with the goal of the 'conquest of equality' and 'moral reform'.²⁶

It seemed, briefly at least, that these efforts would pay off. Beginning with an amnesty in 1859 for those punished for resisting the coup d'état or being militant republicans or socialists, Napoleon III's Second Empire entered a somewhat more liberal phase. The legalisation of strikes in 1864 led to a wave of work stoppages. Laws in 1868 made press censorship less oppressive. A spate of republican newspapers began to publish, notably *La Marseillaise* and *La Lanterne*, which had a circulation of up to 150,000.²⁷

However, despite its new liberal facade, Napoleon III's Second Empire remained a police state, focusing attention on perceived threats to the regime. The Prefecture of Police stored information on as many as 170,000 Parisians. In two decades, the number of police had increased from 750 to more than 4,000, along with countless police spies. The municipal police force was 2,900 strong, backed by garrisoned army units.²⁸

Still, there was a vibrant culture of resistance to Napoleon III. Anyone entering the most popular cafés of the Latin Quarter would encounter a variety of republican and socialist militants determined to bring about a change in regime as they dreamed of creating a government committed to social and political justice. In those days, the *brasserie* Chez Glaser

appeared as if still under construction, with two large chunks of cement at the base of metal poles greeting clients, seemingly the only things keeping the place from collapsing. Small tables of white marble and a billiard table in the rear of the small hall awaited the thirsty. Glaser, an Alsatian school-teacher dismissed by the government for his republican views, had, like most of his customers, little use for Napoleon III's Second Empire.

Other major watering-spots for militants included the Café Madrid on boulevard Montmartre on the Right Bank and, on the Left Bank, the Café de la Salamandre, place Saint-Michel, with the Café d'Harcourt nearby and Café Théodore on rue Monsieur-le-Prince. A *cabinet littéraire* (a bookshop that rented books) on rue Dauphine also brought critics of the regime together, including, from time to time, the naturalist painter Gustave Courbet, a fixture in the Latin Quarter.²⁹

A police report described Courbet with the compelling accuracy of one of his own self-portraits: 'Physically, he has lost his romantic allure.' He was 'big, fat and stooping, walking with difficulty because of back pain, long greying hair, with the air of the mocking *paysan*, and badly dressed'. English resident Ernest Vizetelly described Courbet as 'peasant-like in appearance, puffed out with beer, good-humoured'. Denis Bingham, another British observer, saw the painter as 'a good-natured country farmer . . . Courbet was always treated by his friends as an overgrown child, and he behaved as such'.³⁰ Born in Ornans in Franche-Comté, eastern France, the accent of which he proudly retained, Courbet had been a friend of the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who was from the same region and shared his contempt for the Second Empire. Proudhon held that the purpose of art was 'the physical, intellectual, and moral perfecting of humanity'. Courbet, the *maître d'Ornans*, sought the same freedom in painting that he wanted for individual French men and women.³¹

Courbet emerged as a feisty opponent of Napoleon III. Turned down by the Salon, the annual government exhibition of approved academic painting, in 1863, he insisted he had become a painter 'in order to gain his individual liberty and only he could judge his painting'. In 1870, the government offered Courbet the *Légion d'honneur*. In his letter refusing the award, the painter stated that the government 'seemed to have taken on the task of destroying art in our country . . . the state is incompetent in such matters . . . I am fifty years old and have always lived as a free man – let me end my existence free.'³²

Most Parisians did not feel free. Unlike all the other 36,000 cities, towns and villages in France, Paris did not have the right to elect a mayor. The

post had been abolished in 1794 and again in July 1848. Now Parisians could not even elect *arrondissement* municipal councils – the city's twenty *arrondissements* had municipal councils appointed by the Emperor. Each had a mayor and a deputy mayor, but they, too, were appointed by the government. All this generated calls for self-determination. In 1869–70, demands for municipal autonomy merged with republicanism. In the dance halls and warehouses on the edge of Paris, the idea of one day having a 'Commune', in which Paris would have political rights and stand as a beacon of liberty, gained strength.³³

Raoul Rigault had become a well-known opponent of the imperial regime. He was also a prominent personage in the cafés and brasseries of the boulevard Saint-Michel during the late 1860s. He ate, drank and socialised with young women, some of whose charms he rented for cash. With a bock – a strong beer – in hand, he held court, providing acid commentaries on the Second Empire. Obsessed with the French Revolution, Rigault considered himself the living incarnation of the radical Jacques-René Hébert, whose life and writings he studied carefully when he left his table to cross the Seine to visit the Bibliothèque Nationale. There he took a place at one of the long rows of seats toward the front, always on the left side, of course. He could recite by heart passages penned by Hébert, his hero, the uncompromising revolutionary, guillotined in March 1794 at the order of the Committee of Public Safety.³⁴

Parisian through and through, Rigault was born in the capital in 1846, his father, Charles-Édouard, a respectable republican. Following the coup d'état, the family took up residence in north-western Paris's Seventeenth Arrondissement, whose residents were somewhere between elite and proletarian. Expelled from the Lycée Imperial in Versailles, he nonetheless passed the *baccalauréat* examination in both science and literature. In 1866, Rigault's father kicked him out of their home after a particularly nasty argument. Moving into an attic room on rue Saint-André-des-Arts and earning a little money by giving mathematics lessons, Rigault first began to hang out at the Café Buci, discussing politics or playing billiards. He began calling everyone he met *citoyen* or *citoyenne*, including 'citizen prostitutes', as had the *sans-culottes* of the Revolution. Rigault and other young political radicals organised and published several short-lived newspapers, one of which was seized and shut down by the police in 1865 for containing an article that 'outraged religion'. The offending article had Raoul Rigault written all over it.³⁵

Rigault's café life, interrupted by short spells in gaol, brought him premature corpulence. He was of average height, with 'prying eyes' peering

from behind his pince-nez. Dressing as shabbily as possible and carrying his snuffbox, Rigault welcomed visitors with a shower of spit that flew from his mouth as he harangued and coughed. Some drops caught on his bristly, thick, chestnut-coloured beard, which complemented his long, unruly hair. Those who encountered him noticed that his lips contributed to his seemingly 'ironic', even provocative, pose, his glare piercing and inquisitorial, 'full of sardonic cheekiness'. Rigault's voice rose from resonant to thunderous when the subject turned to politics and class struggle. His temper was notorious; he once shouted at his opponent during an argument, 'I am going to have you shot!'³⁶

Developing an obsession with the organisation and personnel of the police, Rigault studiously followed agents, including the omnipresent police spies (*mouchards*) on their rounds, noting their habits, strengths and weaknesses, as well as their addresses. By dressing as a lawyer, he obtained entry to the court in the Palace of Justice, which considered political crimes, and took careful notes on policemen who testified. Rigault collated the information he gathered or observed in a large file.

Like many other young militants, Rigault joined the International, banned in France in 1868.³⁷ In late 1865, he helped organise a student gathering in the eastern Belgian city of Liège. The next year police arrested him following a raid on a boisterous gathering in the Café Buci – which they subsequently closed for several months – on charges of having formed a secret society known as 'the Renaissance'. Although Rigault refused to swear an oath to tell the truth that invoked Jesus Christ, he was freed because this was his first arrest.

In 1865 Rigault became attracted to Blanquism through Gustave Tridon, a French revolutionary socialist. 'Blanquists' were followers of Auguste Blanqui, '*Le Vieux*' (the Old One), a professional revolutionary and consummate man of action who had spent around half his life in prison for his role in a series of conspiracies. He held that a tightly-organised band of left-wing militants could one day seize revolutionary power.

In order to attend student political meetings in its lecture halls, Rigault enrolled in medical school, not far from his favorite cafés and brasseries. Over the next few years, Rigault's dossier in the Prefecture of Police grew. At the dance hall Folies-Belleville, Rigault found eager listeners among craftsmen and semi-skilled workers. In a speech on December 1868, he called for the recognition of *unions libres* (unmarried couples), arguing that any obstacles to 'the union of a man and a woman' violated the laws of nature. Rigault taunted the ever-present police spies, who scribbled down what was said. That year he published a prospectus for a newspaper,

informing readers, 'God is the absurd'. Later that year, an article of his appeared in *Démocrate*, predicting that if atheists came to power, they would not tolerate their enemies. When, during one court appearance, the prosecuting attorney contemptuously referred to Rigault as a 'professor of the barricades', the target replied, 'Oui! oui!'³⁸

After one arrest, Rigault managed to escape by reaching the roof of a building, running to the Gare de Lyon, and jumping on the first departing train. He got off in Moret-sur-Loing, near Fontainebleau, and for two days wandered through a forest. Rigault came upon Auguste Renoir standing before his easel. The Impressionist painter saw several deer suddenly scatter and heard noises in the bushes. A young man 'of an appearance not terribly engaging appeared. His clothes were torn and covered in mud, his eyes wild and his movements jerky.' Renoir, believing Rigault to be a madman escaped from an institution, grabbed his cane to defend himself. The man stopped several feet from him and exclaimed, 'I beg of you, Monsieur, I am dying of hunger!' Rigault explained his situation, and Renoir, who had republican sympathies, went to town and bought a painter's smock and a box of paints, assuring him that people in the vicinity would ask no questions; peasants there were now quite used to seeing painters.³⁹

Back in Paris, Rigault helped effect an alliance between the 'citizen proletarians' and the radical intelligentsia, linking the traditionally revolutionary faubourg Saint-Antoine and the new workers' bastions of Montmartre and Belleville with the Latin Quarter. At the same time, he helped find funds for upstart newspapers to replace those that had shut down or failed, collecting news and accounts of political trials and publishing torrid denunciations of individuals Rigault considered imperial lackeys. In four years, Rigault faced ten judicial condemnations in court – the *bordel* (whorehouse), as he liked to call it.⁴⁰

Thus in the late 1860s, Paris came alive with the surging political mobilisation of ordinary people. A law of 8 June 1868 permitting freedom of association initiated the frenetic period of the 'public meeting movement'. Crowds flocked to dance halls, café-concerts and warehouses, most of them on the plebeian periphery of Paris, to listen to speeches and debate political themes previously forbidden. From 1868 through mid-1870, almost 1,000 public meetings took place. As many as 20,000 people participated on a single night. Workers remained the principal constituency of the political meetings, although these gatherings drew middle-class Parisians as well. The police, to be sure, were also in attendance, copying down what was said, and thus providing historians with an incredibly rich account of these 'parliaments of the people'.⁴¹

At the beginning of 1870, in the wake of continued liberal political mobilisation and electoral victories, Napoleon III appointed a new cabinet led by Émile Ollivier, a moderate republican, one that was considered a government of conciliation. Yet this brief accommodation between the government and the republican opposition came to an end amid escalating republican militancy. It was no coincidence that the rapprochement ended during a stalled economy that brought hard times. When the financing of Haussmann's grand projects became a public scandal, contributing to growing opposition to the regime, the balloon popped and on 5 January 1870 Napoleon III dismissed the baron as prefect of the Seine, which Ollivier had made one of the conditions of his acceptance of a role in the government. Resentment against Napoleon III mounted, amid strikes and more public meetings. In this precocious springtime, it became possible to imagine a new political world.⁴²

Rigault was entering the Bibliothèque Nationale when he heard the news that on January 11, 1870, Prince Pierre Bonaparte had shot his friend Victor Noir dead during a duel following insults the prince had given two journalists. 'Chouette! Chouette!' (Cool! Cool!), Rigault intoned, because a Bonaparte would finally stand on trial. On 12 January 1870, political opponents of the regime transformed Noir's funeral into a massive demonstration against the empire attended by 100,000 people. Gustave Flourens, one of about 3,000 Blanquists, attempted to turn the demonstration into an insurrection. Rigault also helped organise and lead the march, which included a few workers bearing pistols or iron bars under their blue tradesmen's smocks. Confronted by readied soldiers, the crowd dispersed. A court acquitted the emperor's cousin, condemning the two journalists to prison sentences. The acquittal would not have surprised members of the left; instead, it galvanised them.

In an attempt to bolster support for his empire, in May 1870 Napoleon III resorted to that old Bonapartist – and, later, Gaullist – tactic of organising a plebiscite with sneaky wording to attempt to reassert his authority. It asked French men if they approved of the liberal changes undertaken by the empire. A *non* could thus indicate opposition either to the Emperor or to liberal reforms, such as the relaxation of censorship. Nationwide, 7.4 million men voted *oui*, and 1.5 million *non*, but in Paris the no vote carried by 184,000 to 128,000. Thus, in Paris the plebiscite fell far short of achieving its intended effect. The announcement of the results led to bloody demonstrations and pitched battles with the police, bringing several deaths.⁴³ The Second Empire and its opponents in Paris seemed on a collision course.

CHAPTER 1

War and the Collapse of the Empire

IN 1870, NAPOLEON III FOOLISHLY PUSHED FRANCE INTO WAR WITH Prussia and its south German allies, a war that would undermine his power, strengthen anti-government sentiment, and lead to the collapse of the Second Empire. At issue was the candidacy of Prince Leopold – a member of the Prussian royal Hohenzollern family – for the vacant throne of Spain. If a Prussian became king of Spain, France risked being surrounded by Hohenzollerns, rivals for European continental supremacy, leaving potential enemies on the other side of the Pyrenees as well as across the Rhine.

But the French Emperor had other reasons for wanting a war. His empire had been further weakened by the growing strength of republicans and socialists in France and was still reeling from a foreign policy fiasco in Mexico in 1867, where French forces were defeated and Maximilian, Napoleon III's protégé and Mexico's would-be emperor, was executed. He may have assumed that war with Prussia would bring a relatively easy victory, thereby enhancing his prestige. It was not the first time he had done so; Napoleon had used French victories in the Crimean War of 1853–56 and against Austria in 1859 to remind his people and the rest of Europe of the strength of his empire. When dining with army officers in Châlons-sur-Marne in 1868, he provocatively hoisted a glass of German Rhineland Reisling wine and announced, 'Gentlemen, I hope that you yourselves will shortly be harvesting this wine,' as he nodded towards the east.¹

In 1866, Napoleon III had badly underestimated the strength of the Prussian army, having assumed that Habsburg Austria would emerge victorious in a short war that year for political supremacy in central Europe. He would make the same mistake four years later. The creation of the North

German Federation, dominated by Prussia following Austria's defeat, shifted the balance of power. Even after Prussia's victory, however, the French Emperor had made forceful demands for territorial compensation, in response to the increased might of a rival for power perched across the Rhine from Alsace. Specifically, he insisted on Prussian acquiescence to the possible annexation by France of Belgium and Luxembourg, which Britain and the other powers successfully opposed. Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck rejected written French demands.

In July 1870, under great French pressure, Prince Leopold withdrew his candidacy for the Spanish throne. Napoleon III demanded that King William I of Prussia formally apologise to France and promise that a member of the Hohenzollern royal family would never again be a candidate for the throne of Spain. The French ambassador to Prussia, Count Vincent Bénédicti, aggressively and rudely put forward this insistence to the Prussian king in the spa town of Bad Ems. Bismarck responded with a telegram, later released to the press, that became known as the Ems Dispatch, forcefully embellishing what had occurred. Bismarck, whose father was a Prussian noble (*Junker*), had entered the Prussian bureaucracy after completing law school, where he had been more prominent for duelling scars than for academic success. As prime minister of Prussia, he mastered domestic and international politics with his brand of '*Realpolitik*', the pursuit of national self-interest based on a shrewd assessment of all possibilities. The use of the Ems Dispatch was a calculated manoeuvre to prime his country for war. Bismarck rejected the French demand. The 'Iron Chancellor' of Prussia was now confident that a victorious war against France would lead to the unification of the German states under Prussian leadership.²

The story quickly spread in Prussia and other German states that the French ambassador had arrogantly insulted the king. In both Prussia and France, the mood was bellicose. Many ordinary Parisians, too, seemed to want war, including some republicans. Crowds sang the *Marseillaise*, which had been forbidden in imperial France because it was identified with republicanism and the French Revolution. The popular mood and the expectation of victory were reflected by one publisher's decision to produce a *French-German Dictionary for the Use of the French in Berlin*.³ Egged on by the Foreign Minister, the Duc de Gramont and the Empress Eugénie, as well as a segment of the public, Napoleon III declared war on 19 July 1870.

The German states of Württemberg, Hesse, Baden and Bavaria joined the Prussian side. France went to war without allies. Bismarck revealed to the British the document in which Napoleon III had demanded the

annexation of Belgium and Luxembourg, an attempted power grab that Bismarck knew would anger the British and ensure their neutrality. Newly unified – at least in principle – Italy had not forgiven France for the absorption of Nice in 1860 following a plebiscite and was unwilling to come to their aid now. Gramont foolishly assumed that Austria would join France against its former enemy once French armies had moved into the Prussian Rhineland and Palatinate in south-western Germany, but Austria stayed out of the fray.

Although it would face the Prussians alone, the French army seemed confident of victory. In addition to their victories in the Crimean War and in the war against Austria in 1859, French troops had expanded imperial interests in South-East Asia, giving the officer corps more experience in battle. The debacle in Mexico three years earlier, the army hoped, could be conveniently forgotten.

But military complacency had set in and traditional routines took over. The officer corps was ridden by cliques, intensified by tensions between aristocratic officers and men of ordinary social origins and expectations – lower-middle-class, workers and *paysans*. Experience garnered in one-sided military campaigns in north Africa and South-East Asia could not be easily applied in European warfare.⁴

To make matters worse, French mobilisation for war was nothing short of chaotic. Regiments stationed all over France were carried by trains to often distant mobilisation points, a disorganised, inefficient, and painfully slow process. Reservists had to be summoned from their homes and transported to regimental depots. The army of Alsace was notably short of supplies and funds, and some troops openly hostile to their officers. Even proper topographical maps were unavailable or hard to locate. Commanders had only two-thirds of the number of soldiers anticipated and lacked the massive reserves available to Prussia and its allies.

Prussian mobilisation plans, on the other hand, were well in place. Prussia's railways, public and private, had been placed under military control and modernised with particular attention to wartime needs. In contrast, the French high command had given little consideration to the crucial role of railways so necessary for the rapid and efficient mobilisation of troops. French troop trains moved on a single track, and thus could only be used for transport in one direction at a time. Fifty Prussian trains each day pushed along double tracks towards the front each day on five main lines, as opposed to twelve trains for the French.

Yet the French army had a new breech-loading rifle, the *chassepot*, which was superior to Prussian rifles because soldiers could carry many

more of its smaller-calibre bullets. French troops also had an early version of the machine gun (*mitrailleuse*), rather like the Gatling gun in the US Civil War. It had thirty-seven barrels or 'gun tubes' fired in rapid succession by a soldier quickly turning a hand crank. It soon picked up the nickname of the 'coffee grinder'.

French commanders had little idea of the cohesive and organised Prussian general staff relentlessly overseen since 1857 by Helmuth von Moltke. In sharp contrast, incredibly, France had no head of the general staff. In principle the Emperor commanded the army; he assumed that the fact that he was Napoleon's nephew was enough. Napoleon III, unlike von Moltke, appears to have had no specific plan for waging the war against Prussia.

Within eighteen days of the declaration of war, Prussia and its south German allies had nearly 1.2 million troops at or near the border. One French general reported in panic by telegraph: 'Have arrived at Belfort. Can't find my brigade. Can't find the divisional commander. What shall I do? Don't know where my regiments are.' Demoralised French troops, many of whom were unwilling conscripts ill at ease among professional soldiers who had seen it all, seemed apathetic, playing cards and drinking heavily to bolster their spirits amid food shortages. Commanders were notoriously uninterested in the conditions of their soldiers. Recently recalled reservists lacked sufficient training, and sometimes commitment.⁵

Prussian tactics, developed in the war against Austria four years earlier, emphasised the quick and coordinated movement of units towards enemy positions, thus extending the field of battle. French commanders believed that sturdy lines, armed with *chassepots* and machine guns, supported by artillery fire, would carry the day over the Prussian 'needle-gun' with inferior range. They seemed to have been oblivious to the fact that the sturdy steel Prussian cannons, produced by the Krupp factories, were more powerful and accurate than the older French artillery pieces of bronze and could be fired more rapidly. Moreover, Von Moltke had made his batteries more mobile and thus responsive to changes in the enemy's positions. He had also gone to great lengths to modernise the cavalry, purging incompetent officers, despite their credentials as Prussian nobles. In contrast, aristocrats retained their privileged place in the French officer corps, no matter their incompetence.⁶

The Emperor left Paris for Metz on 28 July, appointing Empress Eugénie to serve as regent in his absence. On 31 July, the French Army of the Rhine moved forward in a pre-emptive strike. French troops crossed the border and captured Saarbrücken, which was virtually undefended because

Prussian armies commanded by von Moltke had bigger fish to fry. This was the last French victory of any consequence. Two Prussian armies then moved into northern Lorraine and a third into northern Alsace. Prussian forces won hard-fought victories at Wissembourg on 4 August, and at Spicheren near the Vosges mountains the following day, while Marshal Achille Bazaine's regiments were camped but nine miles away, and then at Woerth the following day.

The French defeats were not overwhelming and their enemy suffered many casualties, but nonetheless forced the armies of France back. Prussian cannons thundered shell after shell upon the French, with Prussian soldiers well out of range of French machine-guns. Marshal Patrice de MacMahon retreated to Châlons-sur-Marne and Bazaine, now named commander-in-chief, to the fortress of Metz. Chaotic and sometimes ill-informed French orders flew back and forth. Bazaine moved his army in the direction of Verdun, but found the route cut off by von Moltke.⁷

On 18 August, the Prussian army, 188,000 strong, moved against French forces two-thirds their size under the command of Bazaine. In the Battle of Gravelotte, fought just west of Metz, the Prussians inflicted 20,000 casualties (against 12,000 on the German side). Demoralisation and acrimony followed the French armies after such defeats. In Saverne, tipsy soldiers insulted officers whom they found sitting comfortably in a café. Yet another loss made matters worse. Bazaine's army retreated to Metz and the Prussian army besieged the city, defeating the army commanded by MacMahon, who was trying to relieve Bazaine. There, some senior officers had become so disenchanted with Bazaine that they planned, without the marshal's approval, to organise an attempt to break out from Metz and engage the Prussians in battle. But the French commander got word of the plan and it collapsed. For republicans, the incident took on a political tone because Bazaine, as other French commanders, had reached high military office through blatant imperial patronage.

As a Prussian siege of Paris now seemed inevitable, General Louis Trochu had suggested to Napoleon III's war council that Bazaine's army should be withdrawn to the outskirts of Paris, beyond its fortifications, to hold off the Prussians. Six days later, the Emperor arrived in Châlons-sur-Marne to preside over a military meeting to determine whether to follow Trochu's plan. There he found confirmation of just how dire the army's situation had become: seemingly beaten soldiers lounged about, 'vegetating rather than living', as one of their officers put it, 'scarcely moving even if you kicked them, grumbling at being disturbed in their sleep'.⁸ Napoleon III's army seemed resigned to defeat.

In Paris, anxiety about a looming Prussian siege mixed with anger at the French military's miserable defeats, an atmosphere that presented an opportunity to the political left. On 14 August, a group of 'Blanquists' stood ready for revolution. Now, led by a young student, Émile Eudes, a group of Blanquists forced their way into a fire station at La Villette in northern Paris. Their attempt to spark an insurrection came to nothing when the firemen held on to their weapons and workers did not step forward to assist them. The insurgents rapidly retreated to their peripheral bastion of Belleville.⁹

On 17 August, the Emperor named Trochu military governor-general of the Paris region. The conservative's nomination seemed to most Parisians to be sheer provocation. Napoleon III had rejected Trochu's idea that Bazaine's forces return to defend Paris, believing that such a move would suggest near-defeat and could endanger his empire. Instead of attempting to defend Paris from a Prussian siege, it seemed, the Emperor was more concerned about checking civil unrest, a move that only angered an already anxious populace. Nonetheless, Trochu immediately returned to Paris with 15,000 Parisian Mobile Guards (*Gardes Mobile*), newly created companies of reservists, to ensure security in the capital.

French morale continued to falter. The arrival of Mobile Guards near the front increased tensions, in part because they had little military experience. They lounged around Châlons-sur-Marne and other camps in their shiny new uniforms, in contrast with the increasingly tattered apparel of regular soldiers. Moreover, a number of senior officers with strong ties to the empire were now in a mood for peace, in part because of concern about their careers should more defeats follow. The ongoing French military catastrophe accentuated political tensions that had increased in the late 1860s between Bonapartist loyalists and republicans.¹⁰

After sending Trochu to Paris, the Emperor then ordered MacMahon to move his army from Châlons-sur-Marne to Reims, before changing the destination to Montmédy, on the Belgian border. Napoleon III accompanied MacMahon, intending to organise a new army and march on Metz to relieve Bazaine's besieged forces. No French troops now stood between the Prussian armies and Paris; and Trochu, upon his arrival in Paris, found that almost no preparations had been made to defend the capital.

Napoleon III's plan was quickly derailed. On 30 August, von Moltke's army attacked, inflicting heavy casualties and forcing the army of 100,000 men to retreat to the fortress town of Sedan, near the Belgian border. The French army was surrounded. Napoleon III was so weakened by illness that he could barely stay on his horse. On 1 September, the French army tried

to break out of Sedan, but were badly defeated by the Prussians, losing more than 17,000 killed and wounded, with another 20,000 captured. The next day, the Emperor and 100,000 of his soldiers surrendered.

As imperial armies floundered, the political truce between the empire and the republican opposition brought on by the war quickly evaporated. In Paris, revolution already appeared a distinct possibility, not least because the city's National Guard had grown in strength during the war and had become an increasingly organised and militant republican force. As of 12 September, national guardsmen received 1.50 francs per day – *trente sous*; later 75 centimes was added for a spouse and 25 centimes for each child. Poorer families depended on this paltry sum in order to be able to purchase food. National guardsmen elected their company officers, who in turn elected battalion commanders, workers and lower middle-class men largely unknown outside of their neighbourhoods.¹¹

The Left considered the National Guard, which had grown to 134 battalions during the Franco-Prussian War, incorporating 170,000–200,000 men, perhaps even more, as a balance against the professional army, used before the war by the imperial regime to repress strikers. The majority of the units were drawn from the ranks of working-class Parisians, although fancy *quartiers* boasted elite units. The National Guard may not have had access to many *chassepots*, which were held by the regular army, but they were armed and had cannons.

On 3 September, Empress Eugénie received a terse message from Napoleon III: 'The army has been defeated and surrendered. I myself am a prisoner.' Her situation was not much better. Shouts against the empire already echoed in the streets, although many Parisians were unaware of what had transpired of the defeat at Sedan. Eugénie offered provisional authority to Adolphe Thiers, who had served as prime minister from 1830 to 1840 under the Orléanist July Monarchy, but he refused, saying that there was nothing left that could be done for the empire.¹²

Late on 3 September, deputies of the imperial Legislative Body (Corps Législatif) meeting in the Palais Bourbon could hear shouts outside for the proclamation of a republic. In a general tumult, the moderate republican Jules Favre proclaimed the end of the empire well after midnight. Twenty-six deputies named a 'government commission', whose members were yet to be determined, while maintaining Trochu as governor-general of Paris.

On the morning of 4 September, a crowd moved from place de la Concorde across the Seine to Palais Bourbon. A count described the people he watched with condescension as belonging to 'the most diverse

classes', including women, 'who, as always, were noteworthy for their enthusiastic, violent, and hysterical performances'.¹³

Sutter-Laumann, an eighteen-year-old republican, went down from Montmartre to the boulevards, where he found people in a state of noisy agitation. Not long before, he had been arrested and beaten after giving a speech in a public gathering in an old dance hall on boulevard Clichy. Now the word 'treason!' was in the air. Upon hearing that the Emperor had been taken prisoner at Sedan, he walked to place de la Concorde and sat on the pavement to reflect. 'A triumphant clamour' moved towards him, the people shouting for a republic. The young man described his emotions as reflecting 'a triple drunkenness: that of patriotism, that of wine, and that of love'.¹⁴

At Palais Bourbon, troops and the crowd warily eyed each other. Conservative national guardsmen drawn from nearby neighbourhoods were also there, their bayonets glistening in the sun. Then, as late-arriving deputies appeared, someone opened the gates. Parisians stormed into the Palais Bourbon. There, the debate went on: Favre's early-morning proclamation of the end of the empire competed with proposals put forth by the government and by Thiers, which called for the nomination of a 'commission of the government and of national defence'. Léon Gambetta, a radical anti-imperial activist, proclaimed a republic. Crowds then crossed the Seine, moving towards the Hôtel de Ville, that 'superb Louvre of revolutions' that had come to symbolise revolutionary Paris. A number of prominent radical Jacobin republicans and socialists were already there, including the old *quarante-huitards* (forty-eighters, veterans of the 1848 Revolution).¹⁵ Jacobins were an amorphous group of nationalist republicans, inspired by the French Revolution and the role that Paris played in it, who espoused direct democracy and believed that the centralised state ought to look out for the welfare of citizens.

Later, on 4 September, Gambetta proclaimed the Republic for a second time, cheered by the throngs below. The crowd had forced the release from prison of Henri Rochefort, a strident but erratic opponent of the imperial regime. The republican crowd saluted him in triumph. Gambetta proclaimed himself minister of the interior and Favre took on the role of minister of foreign affairs. Rochefort joined the list as the only member of the left. Two days after Napoleon III's defeat at Sedan, his Second Empire had collapsed and the Third Republic had been established.

With Prussian armies moving toward Paris, challenges plagued the new Republic from the start. Serious divisions between moderates and radicals

became immediately apparent, as Paris assumed the right to speak for the rest of the country, much of which was much more conservative than the capital. Blanquists present were particularly outraged by the extremely moderate political composition of the provisional Government of National Defence, but their voices could barely be heard in the chaos.¹⁶

Most Parisians believed that only a republic could save France. Members of the Government of National Defence, the title of which suggested political neutrality, feared another Parisian insurrection and were determined to elbow aside radical republicans and socialists. A Bonapartist wrote in his diary that 'the internal dangers were dreaded as much as the Prussians'.¹⁷ The continued presence of Trochu as the interim president of the government was intended to reassure conservatives and moderates; he made clear his commitment to 'God, Family and Property'. In the meantime, Paris took on a festive air, its people confident that republican unity, unlike the regime of Napoleon III and Eugénie, would ultimately defeat the Prussians.

Empress Eugénie fled Paris, leaving behind the disorder of empty jewel boxes tossed on the floor in haste, as well as an unfinished, elegantly prepared meal which 'revolutionaries' finished upon storming into the Tuileries.¹⁸ Fearing both Prussian troops and a republic, many other wealthy residents also took the easy way out, leaving the more prosperous western *arrondissements* for the safety of country houses. As they did, workmen replaced Paris signs announcing 'rue du 10 décembre', the date Louis Napoleon Bonaparte had been elected president in 1848, with 'rue du 4 septembre', still the name today. Hammers pounded away the 'N' for Napoleon on bridges and stone monuments.

The Left mobilised quickly. Raoul Rigault, a militant Blanquist who had been hiding in Versailles from the police, arrived in Paris on 5 September, the day after the proclamation of the Republic. That day, members of 'Vigilance Committees' that radical republicans had created in each *arrondissement* (and which constituted a Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, organised by members of Karl Marx's International Workingmen's Association, which had been founded in London in 1864) demanded elections for a municipal government. Ten days later, a red poster (*affiche rouge*) repeated this demand. Rigault and other Blanquists began feverishly planning an insurrection. They rushed to Mazas prison near the Gare de Lyon, freeing Eudes and several other political prisoners. Rigault then went to the Prefecture of Police and installed himself in the office of the head of security. Rigault combed through documents in the police archives to uncover the names of those

who had worked as imperial police spies, in the hope of later punishing them. Given his obsession with the police, Rigault was the perfect person for the job. Blanqui described his ardent disciple as having 'a vocation . . . He was born to be Prefect of Police.'¹⁹

France was a divided, fledgling Republic. Many on the left believed that the circumstances might provide an opportunity to establish a radical, progressive Republic. Reconstituted Parisian political clubs joined the chorus. Plebeian Paris led the way. On 6 September, Jules Vallès, a radical journalist, organised a club in Belleville. It met in the Salle Favié, one of the bastions of the public meeting movement before the war. In Montmartre in the Eighteenth Arrondissement, André Léo (Victoire Léodile Béra, a writer who took the names of her twin sons) and Nathalie Le Mel (a bookbinder, a frequent orator in the public meeting movement, and one of the founders of a consumers' cooperative in Montmartre) were among militant women devoted to the cause of defending Paris, working-class families, and the Republic. There the *mairie* (the town hall of each *arrondissement*) provided some social services in response to letters written by working-class women asking for assistance. These letters reflected the women's suffering as they tried to make do for themselves and their families with the help of friends and neighbours.²⁰ In the Thirteenth Arrondissement, the Club Démocratique Socialiste announced it would study 'all of the social and political problems related to the emancipation of work and of workers', while remaining vigilant against any attempt to restore monarchy. The Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements held its first meeting on 11 September. It gradually evolved into the equivalent of a party of the Left, committed to the Republic and to continuing the war. Blanquists were active in the Central Committee, meeting in clubs in Montmartre and in the Sixth Arrondissement.²¹

It was also in September that 'Commune' began to be heard in the context of the 'revolutionary nationalism' that followed the outbreak of the war. The historical precedent was the 'revolutionary Commune' that took power in August 1792, when France had been besieged by foreign states. Now demands for popular sovereignty and Parisian self-government emerged as part of the definition of what a desired 'Commune' was meant to be, even as Prussian troops threatened the capital. For people on the political left, the Commune's role would be expanded to include major social reforms. Thus 'Commune' would take on different meanings to different people, depending on their allegiances.²²

On 15 September, the Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements signed a wall poster calling for the arming of all Parisians

and 'popular control' over defence, food supply and lodgings. This was part of an explosion of demands for municipal autonomy in the early days of the Republic, a desire that had emerged in the context of heavy-handed imperial centralisation under Napoleon III. Calls for municipal autonomy were even louder given the threat of a Prussian invasion. In the tradition of the French Revolution, and most recently in the public meeting movement that had begun in 1868, republicans believed that popular organisation alone would permit the defence of Paris against enemy troops surrounding the city. Political clubs and the vigilance committees therefore put forth calls for an 'all-out war' (*guerre à l'outrance*) in defence of Paris. To make things a little easier for ordinary Parisians readying for war, the Government of National Defence on 30 September declared a moratorium on the payment of rents and instructed the Municipal Pawnshop (Mont-de-Piété) to return pawned items at no cost if they were worth less than 15 francs.²³

The armies of Prussia and its allies laid siege to Paris from 19 September, while other enemy forces moved away from the city towards the Loire River. On 10 October, a Prussian force of 28,000 men attacked a position held by the reconstituted French Army of the Loire, its numbers swollen by a flood of volunteers. The Prussian troops carried the day and captured Orléans. The French army withdrew, grew in strength to about 70,000 men, and retook that city. However, the arrival of more Prussian troops from north-eastern France led to more French defeats in the Loire region and at Le Mans on 11–12 January 1871.²⁴

The Prussians had allowed Napoleon III to depart for exile in Great Britain, the third French head of state (following King Charles X after the Revolution of 1830 and King Louis-Philippe after that of 1848) to be sent packing across the English Channel.

With Prussian forces besieging Paris, the *arrondissement* 'vigilance committees' selected 'delegates' to an all-Parisian Vigilance Committee, which was dominated by left-wing republicans and socialists. The Government of National Defence named new mayors for each *arrondissement*. The republican Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements also demanded participation in decisions concerning the defence of Paris. National guard units began to tighten their organisation and achieved imposing authority in the neighbourhoods from which they had been recruited.

One Parisian, Félix Belly, opened up an office hoping to attract enough women – 30,000 – to fill ten battalions, each of eight companies. These all-female defence units would be attired in black trousers and blouses and

hats with orange bands and would promise not to drink or smoke. Belly's egalitarian units never materialised, however. He briefly needed protection from neighbours who complained about the noise, and the plan quickly evaporated when Trochu banned the new units.²⁵

The young republican Sutter-Laumann, conscripted into the army, described the strange sense of security that existed in Paris during the siege. The army assumed that the exterior forts could keep the Prussian troops at bay, but they would soon be proven wrong. Sutter-Laumann's baptism of fire was in a *sortie* on the route de Neuilly-sur-Marne, followed by several other episodes of fighting. The Parisian population had begun to manifest 'considerable irritation', Sutter-Laumann noticed, as Prussian troops easily fended off the *sorties*.²⁶

In early October, Gambetta, the minister of the interior, courageously flew over the Prussian lines in a balloon, and raised a sizable army that continued the fight against the enemy. And then incredible news arrived from Lorraine. On 27 October, Bazaine inexplicably surrendered his army of 155,000 soldiers at Metz. This virtually ended any hope of relieving the besieged Parisians and defeating the Prussians and their allies. Rumours of treason abounded, particularly when it became known that the French commander had been secretly negotiating with his Prussian counterparts.

Parisians were quick to react. On 31 October, Sutter-Laumann heard shouts of 'Long live the Commune!' in faubourg Saint-Denis, as Paris, hungry and freezing, held out. Angry workers charged down the hill from Belleville and other plebeian *quartiers* into central Paris and the Hôtel de Ville, goaded by members of radical clubs and vigilance committees who called for insurrection. Blanquists stormed into the Hôtel de Ville. Gustave Lefrançais, a national guard officer, jumped on a table and proclaimed the end of the Government of National Defence, just two months after it had been proclaimed. The militants announced a new government, headed by old names from the Revolution of 1848: Félix Pyat and Charles Delescluze, as well as the inveterate revolutionary Auguste Blanqui. Gustave Flourens arrived with some national guardsmen and pushed Lefrançais off centre stage, adding new members to the government. Flourens and Lefrançais hated each other and the latter simply went home. Rigault had arrived as well, and Blanqui ordered him to take men to the Prefecture of Police to secure it.

But soon the workers returned to their *quartiers* in north and north-eastern Paris, many thinking that they had succeeded in overthrowing the provisional government, and only Flourens's group of guardsmen remained at the Hôtel de Ville. Trochu and Jules Ferry, another member

of the provisional government, took advantage of the crowd's departure and the next day regained control of the municipal building. Blanqui barely escaped a manhunt organised by the police of the re-established Government of National Defence.²⁷

Following the attempted insurrection on 31 October, militants organised even more political clubs, driven as much by political desires as by despair during the ongoing siege. Hunger gnawed, as soaring food prices defied the best efforts of *arrondissement* officials to deal with the situation by handing out ration cards and distributing what food could be found. Club speakers denounced hoarders and made more heated demands for a 'revolutionary Commune'. A republican Central Committee was formed, led by prominent militants who had spoken in public meetings during the last two years of the empire. The results of a plebiscite on 3 November and municipal elections two days later may have reflected the ascendancy of moderate voices, but they did nothing to still the militancy of the left, increasingly based in working-class *quartiers*. Some *arrondissement* mayors encouraged the creation of producers' cooperatives and vigilance committees that played a role in the allocation of food and weapons. Blanquists and other revolutionaries began to form their own clubs, firming up the relationship between militant intellectuals such as Rigault and Parisian workers.²⁸

At the beginning of the siege, Parisian families had ridden the train around Paris's walled circumference and picnicked near the ramparts, before they realised that Prussian shells could actually kill them. The 'Scientific Committee' of the Government of National Defence received many suggestions beginning early in the siege about how Parisians might extricate themselves from the siege. Ideas submitted were laughable and included letting loose 'all the more ferocious beasts from the zoo – so that the enemy would be poisoned, asphyxiated, or devoured'. Another proposed the construction of a 'musical *mitrailleuse*' that would lure unsuspecting Prussian soldiers by playing Wagner and Schubert, and then mow them down; another arming the thousands of prostitutes of Paris with 'prussic fingers' – needles filled with poison that would be injected into the Prussians at a crucial moment during a close encounter.²⁹

But reality set in after Bazaine's surrender, as the siege continued and the weather worsened. The only mail going in or out of Paris was transported by sixty-five balloon flights that flew over enemy lines. Pigeons carried messages beyond the Prussian lines. By late October, all became deadly serious, as the weather became unbearably cold, the Seine froze, and food supplies dwindled. A military attempt to break out of Paris – a

'*Grand Sortie*' – and inflict damage on enemy forces failed miserably on 31 October, the same day of the failed political insurrection. The French lost more than 5,000 troops, twice that of their German adversaries.

Edmond de Goncourt wrote in his journal on 8 December: 'People are talking only of what they eat, what they can eat, and what there is to eat . . . Hunger begins and famine is on the horizon.' Signs advertising 'canine and feline butchers' began to appear. Pet-owners had to guard their dogs instead of the reverse. Mice and even rats began to be eaten, an American claiming that the latter tasted rather like a bird. Slices of zoo animals, such as bear, deer, antelopes, and giraffes, ended up on Parisian plates. The very elderly and very young suffered most, with small coffins being carried through the streets an increasingly common sight.³⁰

The long siege had further isolated Paris – politically as well as economically – from the provinces, particularly the west of France. In Paris the conservative *L'Opinion nationale* on 1 January regretted that some *quartiers* had fallen into the hands of 'Communeux', a bourgeois fear that 'evoked the Terror' of the French Revolution. For conservatives who remained in Paris, any mention of a 'Commune' began to take on a terrifying aspect.³¹

On the morning of 6 January, Parisians awoke to see another bright red poster plastered on the buildings that read, 'Make way for the Paris Commune!' Rigault was among the signatories of this *affiche rouge*. The Club Favié of Belleville approved the resolution: 'The Commune is the right of the people . . . it is the *levée en masse* and the punishment of traitors. The Commune, finally . . . is the Commune.' In club meetings the term 'Commune' was still being heard in the sense of municipal rights, but now with a more progressive turn, with Paris and its teeming working-class neighbourhoods imagined as the centre of a democratic and social republic. The vigilance committee of the Eighteenth Arrondissement proclaimed that 'the *quartiers* are the fundamental base of the democratic Republic'.³²

Another military defeat heightened calls for a Commune. On 18 January, a force of 100,000 troops commanded by Trochu attempted to break out of Paris and defeat Prussian forces. The result was a catastrophe, with the loss of more than 4,000 men killed or wounded. This led to a frenzied demonstration that verged on insurrection on 22 January. Crowds shouted against Trochu. Blanquists called for the proclamation of a Commune. Blanqui himself sat in a café near the Hôtel de Ville, and from the windows of the latter, shots ordered by the moderate republican Gustave Chaudey, a friend of Rigault, greeted the demonstration. The gunfire left five dead on the pavement below, including another of Rigault's friends,

Théophile Spia, his blood drenching Rigault. The crowd quickly dispersed, but this latest mobilisation of the Left and the violence that followed only increased the gap between the Left and conservatives in the Government of National Defence.³³

On 28 January, the Government of National Defence agreed to an armistice with the Prussians and their allies that would finally end the siege. Jules Favre signed the surrender two days later, meeting Bismarck in Versailles. Paris had held on for four months, but Prussian cannons had destroyed parts of the city and Parisians had suffered enormously. Unsurprisingly, most Parisians remained against any concessions to the Prussians, although Bismarck now allowed convoys of food to enter the capital. The terms of the armistice were harsh and outraged Parisians, among many other French people. France would owe an enormous indemnity to the new German empire, which was proclaimed, to the great humiliation of France, in the Hall of Mirrors in the Château de Versailles. Even worse, by the Treaty of Versailles signed by Thiers and Bismarck on 26 February – later formalised by the Treaty of Frankfurt on 6 May – France would lose the relatively prosperous region of Alsace and much of Lorraine to Germany.³⁴ Léon Gambetta resigned in disgust from what was left of the Government of National Defence on 1 March. Prussian forces remained camped around Paris, with ready access to the city.

After the armistice, the French Government of National Defence, which had utterly failed in its mission of defending France, immediately called for elections for a new National Assembly which would create a new regime. Despite protests from republicans that such a short time between military capitulation and elections would favour monarchists, the elections were scheduled for early February. Republicans and socialists organised a Central Committee of the National Guard to defend the Republic, now clearly threatened by the possibility that monarchists would dominate the new National Assembly.³⁵ They appeared ready to take matters into their own hands.

The national elections on 8 February, the results of which were somewhat of an aberration because of the exceptional circumstances and lack of preparation, returned overwhelmingly conservative, monarchist deputies to the National Assembly, which was to meet not in Paris but in Bordeaux. In sharp contrast, thirty-six of forty-three deputies elected from Paris were republicans, most who believed that France, led by Paris, should keep fighting the Prussians. Yet in Paris revolutionary candidates won only 50,000 of 329,000 votes (15.2 per cent) and accounted for only seven of

the forty-three men elected. *Le Rappel* on 8 February commented: 'It is no longer an army you are facing . . . it is no longer Germany . . . It is more. It is monarchy, it is despotism.'³⁶ And on cue, on 17 February 1871, the National Assembly meeting in Bordeaux voted Adolphe Thiers executive powers.

Thiers might have been identified with the Parisian bourgeoisie, but, born out of wedlock in Marseille in 1797, he remained Provençal in some ways. His father Louis, a hustler who had compromised the family status and wealth, had disappeared. With the help of a partial scholarship, Thiers entered the *lycée* in Marseille in 1809. Absorbed by liberal politics, in November 1815 he began law school in Aix-en-Provence.

When he was offered a position with *Le Constitutionnel*, a moderate royalist newspaper critical of the Bourbon monarchy, Thiers moved to Paris. A contract to write a history of the Revolution earned him money and he made useful salon contacts in the capital. Thiers was relatively small at five feet two inches, and anything but handsome. He had little patience for anyone else. The poet Lamartine recalled, 'He speaks first, he speaks last, he doesn't pay much attention to any reply.' Thoroughly from the Midi, he spoke quickly and in colourful language, with a Marseillais accent leaning on the last syllable, accompanied by rapid gestures for emphasis. He had a solemn voice as orator, and seemed to an admirer 'graced with an almost divine authority'. Ambitious and hard-working, he had a reputation for garrulousness and cutting retorts. Here perhaps was a Napoleonic complex, if there is indeed such a thing. Even a friend noted that Thiers reacted to anyone who 'refused him blind confidence' with outrage and verbal violence.³⁷

The election of a National Assembly dominated by monarchists and led by Thiers, whom many people on the Left had reason not to trust, increased tension and galvanised revolutionaries in Paris. On 15 February a crowd of working-class Parisians stormed into the archbishop's palace. Archbishop Georges Darboy asked what the people intended, telling them that, if they were eyeing the furniture, it all belonged to the state. As for the books, he pointed out that they were precious to him, but not to them. All that remained would be his life. The Parisians left him alone.³⁸

On 20 February, three days after the National Assembly granted Thiers executive powers, André Léo left Paris to try to convince the *paysans* that they too would suffer because of a monarchist-dominated National Assembly. Within Paris, the Left began to unite in opposition to the National Assembly. The Central Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements

and members of Karl Marx's International Workingmen's Association found much on which to agree. For his part, Rigault also reached out to moderates, aiming to build a coalition capable of seizing power. A Revolutionary Socialist Party, based in radical clubs and the *arrondissement* vigilance committees, emerged during those heady days, its adherents expressing determination to achieve social equality in Paris. A Declaration of Principles announced that it sought 'by all possible means the suppression of the privileges of the bourgeoisie, its downfall as the directing class, and the political advent of workers – in a word, social equality'.³⁹

Of course, German troops still surrounded much of the capital, their cannons stretching beyond the northern and eastern walls of Paris. Not enough stood between them and entry into Paris, should signs of resistance to the armistice materialise. Republicans in Paris were wary of Prussian troops, and not simply because they posed a military threat. Parisian republicans also feared that they could well help restore the monarchy.

Radical republicans were right to question the future of republicanism under Thiers. He had earlier indicated that he supported a restoration of the monarchy, although he did not say which one: Bourbon (supported by the 'Legitimists') or Orléanist, a son of Louis-Philippe, overthrown in 1848. This explains why the National Assembly, dominated by monarchists, elected him 'head of the executive authority of the Republic' when they convened in Bordeaux in February 1871. But Thiers also enjoyed increasing support from conservative republicans. In 1850, he had expressed his belief that 'the Republic is the regime that divides us the least'. This now seemed particularly true given the mistrust between Legitimists and Orléanists. Legitimists would accept a restoration on their terms, insisting that the white flag of the Bourbons be maintained. With the heir to the Bourbon throne, the Count of Chambord, childless, one solution could be that upon his death the throne would pass to the Orléanists, with the tricolour flag. The Bourbon pretender refused. Amid the tension between the two families, Thiers tried to assure moderate republicans that he was not 'the instrument of a plot formed in the National Assembly to abolish the republic'.⁴⁰ Yet most Parisians suspected Thiers of intending to do just that, even if the government established by Thiers did not reflect monarchist domination of the National Assembly. Moreover, three commanders of the army – Joseph Vinoy, Patrice de MacMahon, and Gaston Galliffet – were conservatives, Bonapartists to be sure, but who would prefer without question a monarchy to a republic.⁴¹

The collective memory of previous revolutions remained powerful in Paris, and the next demonstration against the National Assembly occurred

on an important date. On the anniversary of the Revolution of 24 February 1848, a huge crowd formed at the place de la Bastille, surrounding the Victory Column that had been erected following the July Revolution of 1830. Two days later, passers-by saw an undercover policeman observing them near the Seine. They grabbed him and – egged on by shouts of ‘Into the water! Into the water!’ – tied his arms and legs and threw him into the river from quai Henri IV. When he bobbed to the surface they pushed him under until he drowned. Many Parisians hated the police, and attacks on policemen had occurred from time to time.⁴² This time, however, the attack took on political significance. That evening, a crowd of Parisians outnumbered soldiers guarding national guard cannons at place Wagram and hauled the guns up to the heights of Montmartre. Meanwhile, crowds rushed the prison of Saint-Pélegie to free political prisoners. To put down the rioting crowds, General Vinoy, the commander of the Paris region, called out what he considered reliable units of the National Guard, most of whom openly opposed the new government. Few men responded.

The Parisian National Guard was not a professional military force, instead consisting of ordinary men proud to defend their city and the *quartiers* from which they had been mobilised. Indeed it seemed that during the Franco-Prussian War what was left of the empire feared the largely plebeian National Guard more than the Prussian army. The abolition of France’s professional army, which had disappointed all of France with its defeat in the war, was essential in the Commune’s vision of the new Paris. In this vision, the National Guard would ensure the defence of the capital.

The new Central Committee of the National Guard had emerged as a revolutionary authority in the weeks after the armistice. It demanded that the National Guard retain its weapons, including, above all, its cannons, some of which had been purchased by the units themselves, and many of which now stood on Montmartre or in Belleville. A member insisted that the National Guard represented ‘an inexorable barrier erected against any attempt to reverse the Republic’.⁴³ Clearly, given its composition, the provisional government of Thiers could not count on the National Guard to be an effective repressive force in the face of mounting popular political anger and mobilisation. Of 260 National Guard battalions in Paris, only about sixty could be counted to defend ‘order’ as Thiers defined it.⁴⁴

Parisians who had seethed at the stunning French military defeat and the humiliating terms of the armistice were reminded of it yet again when German troops entered Paris on 27 February. Four days later Parisians who happened to be near the Arc de Triomphe watched in anger as several French officers getting out of carriages had German ladies on their arms.

Republican Paris radicalised, furious at the seeming cowardice if not duplicity of Thiers and the Government of National Defence for having capitulated. Paris seemed to be moving in a very different direction from much of the rest of France.⁴⁵

Demonstrations occurred almost daily at the place de la Bastille, as Parisians prepared for the departure of German troops following their triumphant march down the Champs-Élysées on 3 March. The resources of Paris were also stretched by the presence of tens of thousands of French troops, many undisciplined and eagerly awaiting demobilisation. Many officers were young, recently promoted. Like the men under their command, their loyalty to Thiers and the National Assembly could not be assured. Political allegiances mattered little when French soldiers were distracted by poverty and hunger. One observer witnessed 'the most lamentable of spectacles. Soldiers wandering about . . . their uniforms sullied, dishevelled, without weapons, some of them stopping passers-by asking for some money.'⁴⁶

Soon after the Prussian troops departed, the new government passed laws that seemed a blatant affront to struggling Parisians. On 7 March, the National Assembly ended the moratorium that had been declared by the Government of National Defence on items deposited at the Municipal Pawnshop. Goods deposited there could now be sold if not reclaimed. But reclaimed with what? Most Parisians had no money. The London *Times* reported that '2,300 poor wretches had pawned their mattresses, and starving seamstresses had pawned 1,500 pairs of scissors . . . How many necessities to existence were stored away in these cruel galleries? . . . the gaunt secret frowning on us from every loaded shelf . . . starvation!' The Assembly also ended the moratorium on the payment of bills of exchange (promissory notes which required that funds owed be paid), adding that holders must redeem them with interest during the next four months. This move had devastating consequences for Parisian businessmen of modest means. At least 150,000 Parisians immediately defaulted on bills they owed. Worse, the Assembly ended the moratorium on the payment of rent – families that could not pay up could be expelled. This hit ordinary Parisians hard – the vast majority of the population rented their lodgings. Not satisfied with these moves against the poor, the Assembly ended the daily stipend of 1.50 francs for national guardsmen, leaving tens of thousands of families without enough money to buy food and fuel.⁴⁷

On 10 March, the National Assembly made the decision to meet in Versailles, formerly the capital of kings. The fort of Mont-Valérien stood nearby to offer protection. In Thiers's provocative words, 'Honesty

would not allow me to promise the Assembly complete safety in Paris.⁴⁸ Thiers immediately met with mayors or municipal council members from Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, and other major cities. Thiers blamed Paris for revolutionary activity, while assuring the other cities' leaders of his support for a republic as a way of undercutting their possible support for insurgent Paris.⁴⁹

When Thiers and his government arrived to set up shop in Versailles, the Germans had only recently departed the former capital of the Bourbon monarchs. Versailles in some ways resembled, in the conservative republican Jules Simon's words, a city of 'German taverns, and the smell of tobacco, beer and leather'. The orderly Prussians had destroyed nothing, leaving a few signs in German at the railway station and on the walls of the barracks.⁵⁰

Versailles opened its arms to Thiers, the National Assembly, and the wealthy *beau monde* fleeing an increasingly turbulent Paris. Viscount Camille de Meaux was struck by the contrast between the grim-faced newly arrived and fancy folk 'heated up' by good meals. Government officials, deputies, diplomats, military officers, journalists, and people seeking posts swarmed through boulevards that had been practically deserted since 1789. The Château of Versailles became a sort of 'ministerial beehive' that took over vast rooms of marble and superb salons decorated with renowned paintings and complete with magnificent ceilings.⁵¹

Despite the wealth of most of those arriving in Versailles, the population of which jumped from 40,000 to about 250,000, it became difficult to find suitable lodgings. Newcomers complained of poorly furnished rooms with hard beds, but the restaurants of the capital of the Bourbons welcomed diners with stomachs empty and wallets full. During the first week of the Commune, the railway stations of Paris were encumbered by people trying to leave – it seemed like *le grand départ* in the summer months in normal times.

Exiled Parisians found in Versailles 'their newspapers, their restaurants, their clubs, their gentlemanly relations, and even their bankers'. Charles Laffitte ran into a friend from Paris's exclusive Jockey Club now dressed in relative 'tatters'. High finance turned up in the salons of Versailles, including Baron Rothschild. Hector Pessard, editor-in-chief of *Le Soir*, described 'The artillery of Veuve Clicquot firing popping [champagne] corks against restaurant ceilings.' However, at the beginning he found only 'a mob . . . uniquely preoccupied with particular interests'. More troops arrived every day in Versailles and France's elite bought them drinks and cigars. On Easter Sunday, the abbé du Marhallac'h, deputy from Morbihan,

said Mass before a huge throng on the plateau de Satory, raising the host on an altar complete with military trappings, 'a truly grand spectacle . . . under a radiant sky, around a priest who blesses and who prays'.⁵²

Paris, just a few months earlier the home of France's government and its wealthiest families, now seemed to be under the control of ordinary people who demanded municipal rights and social reform. France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War had brought about an end to Napoleon III's regime, and the long siege of Paris that followed Napoleon's surrender only angered Parisians who had long been critical of the Emperor. Radicalised by the war, working-class Parisians and republican and socialist intellectuals alike were no longer willing to stand for centralised government oppression. When Thiers and the National Assembly, dominated by monarchist and conservative members, seemed ready to reinstate a monarchy, Parisian republicans – supported by potentially revolutionary National Guard units – were prepared to run the city themselves.

CHAPTER 2

The Birth of the Commune

WITH THIERS'S GOVERNMENT CONVENING IN THE GRAND CHÂTEAU OF the Bourbon monarchy, republicans had even more reason to worry about a possible monarchist restoration. The government's move to Versailles, for centuries identified with the close alliance of the Bourbon monarchy and the Catholic Church, further inflamed popular opinion. Thiers had once asserted, 'I want to make the clergy's influence all-powerful, because I am counting on it to propagate that good philosophy that teaches man that he is here below to suffer, and not that other philosophy that tells man the opposite: take pleasure.'¹

On 11 March 1871 the Versailles government banned six newspapers of the Left. This news reached Paris after word came that a court-martial had condemned to death in absentia Auguste Blanqui and another popular revolutionary, Gustave Flourens, for their roles in the attempted insurrection of 31 October during the Prussian siege.

Parisians mobilised against the provisional government sending out decrees from Versailles, and government troops spent much of late February and early March reacting to riotous crowds. General Joseph Vinoy's forces, limited by the armistice with the Prussians to 12,000 troops and 3,000 gendarmes, had already dispersed several demonstrations. Vinoy, who had left a seminary to enter the army as a young man and whose temperament was as chilly as the Alps of his native Dauphiné, believed Paris was being taken over by 'ring-leaders', 'the lowest of the low', and 'guilty agitators', intent on 'pillage' and sowing 'disorder'. The US Ambassador, E.B. Washburne, realised that the government was losing control of Paris: on 16 March he sent a dispatch to Washington relating that 'the insurrectionists of Paris are gaining in power and strength every hour'.²

On 17 March, Thiers decided to move against the Parisian militants. He would send troops early the next morning to capture the National Guard cannons, most of which had been moved to Montmartre (171 cannons) or Belleville (74 cannons), both *quartiers populaires* – predominantly neighbourhoods of workers – from which they could dominate the city. Thiers made his decision for economic reasons as well as political ones. He explained, 'Businessmen were going around constantly repeating that the financial operations would never be started until all those wretches were finished off and their cannons taken away. An end had to be put to all this, and then one could get back to business.' A crowd thwarted Thiers's troops' first attempt on Montmartre on 12 March. To the citizens of that *quartier*, the National Guard's cannons represented the right of Paris to arm itself. They would stop at nothing to keep the guns from government troops. Thiers's officers, meanwhile, hurriedly prepared a plan to occupy Paris.³

On Montmartre, the cannons still stood in two rows on the heights and on a plateau further down the Butte. Four days later, soldiers under Thiers's orders tried again to retrieve some of the guns, but were countered by National Guardsmen. The next day Thiers decided to have the cannons brought down early the following day, in order to 'disarm Paris' and its 'revolutionary party'. The task at hand was exceedingly difficult, requiring soldiers to seize the cannons and haul them down the steep, narrow cobblestone streets through hostile neighbourhoods.

On the evening of 17 March, General Louis d'Aurelle de Paladines, an old Bonapartist now suspected of having changed his allegiance to the Bourbons, whom Thiers had named head of the National Guard of Paris, convoked commanders of about thirty or forty conservative national guard units. He ordered them to have their men ready the next morning. At about 4.30 a.m. on 18 March, troops under Vinoy were in place to begin bringing down the National Guard cannons from Montmartre. Soldiers commanded by General Claude Lecomte also went up to Montmartre from the north. A column of about 4,000 men under the command of General Bernard de Susbille was to set up a command post at place Pigalle. Another column was to take control of Belleville, while a division was to remain below and assure control of the neighbourhoods between the Hôtel de Ville and the place de la Bastille.⁴

Very early in the morning, as women in these neighbourhoods went out to buy bread, they found themselves face to face with soldiers clad in the red trousers, blue tunics, and red and blue caps of the regular army. Georges Clemenceau, mayor of the Eighteenth Arrondissement, was

surprised and angered to see soldiers when he left his apartment at about 6.00 a.m. He expressed his 'extreme surprise and disappointment' with the military operation to one of the commanders. Thiers had ordered the military operation without notifying the *arrondissement* mayors, who had tried to achieve the peaceful surrender of the cannons. Clemenceau had hoped that the guns could be returned without a show of force by Thiers's provisional government. But, for the moment, all was calm, and some residents of Montmartre chatted amiably with troops in a light Parisian rain.⁵

From the place Clichy, soldiers commanded by Susbille, led by gendarmes who knew the streets of Montmartre, moved to secure the cannons standing near the Moulin de la Galette and Château Rouge, as well as to occupy the Tour Solferino. General Lecomte's soldiers were to take control of the cannons standing near the large dance hall at Château Rouge. Troops blocked entry to the church of Saint-Pierre, preventing the ringing of the tocsin that would have alerted Parisians and republican National Guard troops to the threat. By 6.00 a.m., General Lecomte's force held the Butte of Montmartre. Soldiers set up posts on the eastern and southern slopes of the hill to facilitate the descent of the cannons in case of trouble, pushing aside National Guardsmen assigned to protect them. They posted a proclamation from Thiers explaining that taking back the cannons was 'indispensable to the maintenance of order'. The proclamation stated that Thiers wanted to eliminate the 'insurrectionary committee' that he insisted existed, whose members were almost all unknowns, representing 'communist' doctrines while preparing to turn Paris over to pillage.⁶

In the meantime, residents of Montmartre got into several churches, climbing into steeples to ring the tocsin, the stirring sound of alarm. Parisians poured into the streets. At place Saint-Pierre, soldiers filled in small trenches that had been dug to keep the guns from being easily moved, while onlookers, including men in work clothes, expressed their hostility. Although troops had arrived several hours earlier, the guns were still in place. About 2,000 horses were needed to haul the cannons down from Montmartre and they had not arrived, nor had enough coupling attachments with which to hitch the horses to the cannons.⁷ In Belleville, word spread that line troops had come to take the cannons, including some standing in the park of Ménilmontant. Several strongly republican National Guard units were already afoot, arriving at rue Puebla as troops were hauling cannons towards rue de Belleville. Belleville residents and national guardsmen began to construct impromptu barricades

to prevent troops from moving the cannons through the streets. Many of the soldiers had turned their rifles upside down, a sign that they were not about to use them. When government drums began to beat, summoning National Guard units considered reliable, no guardsmen came to join their commanders.

At the *mairie* of Belleville, an English correspondent for the London *Times* came upon a platoon of cavalry looking like it intended to fight, armed with three *mitrailleuses*, and stationed near the cannons, with horses standing nearby. But hostility quickly evaporated into fraternisation, as nearby residents began building a barricade and the troops made no move to stop them. Finally at about eleven o'clock the small detachment headed towards Buttes-Chaumont, where it stopped. Going back to Montmartre, the Englishman noticed that 'there was not a red trouser [i.e. French soldiers' trousers] to be seen, excepting here and there a straggler making a fraternal speech to an admiring audience . . . These streets, so deserted in the morning, excepting here and there a slinking warrior, were now swarming with them, drums were beating, bugles blowing, and all the din of victory.'⁸

The uneasy peace between soldiers and guardsmen did not last long. A confrontation occurred after troops surprised guardsmen, who opened fire, wounding a cavalryman. One National Guardsman, a man called Turpin, challenged gendarmes and was shot and mortally wounded. Several other guardsmen were captured and held in the Tour de Solferino. A few managed to get away and spread the alarm. Soldiers and horses managed to begin hauling two convoys of guns down the hill from Montmartre. A crowd stopped a third on rue Lepic, but soldiers managed to clear the way and the convoy made it all the way down and across the Seine to the École Militaire on the Left Bank. Elsewhere, nothing went smoothly for the troops. A detachment moving towards the Moulin de la Galette found its way blocked by National Guardsmen who called out to the troops to join them. One guardsman gave an officer a blow of a rifle butt to the head, while some soldiers made their way quickly down the hill. At Place Pigalle, shots from National Guardsmen killed a captain who ordered his troops to clear the area.⁹

When Clemenceau went to the National Guard headquarters at about 7.30 a.m., he came upon Louise Michel, who had been active in the Eighteenth Arrondissement vigilance committee. She left hurriedly, and ran down the hill: 'I descended the Butte, my rifle under my coat, shouting Treason! . . . believing that we would die for liberty. We were risen from the earth. Our deaths would free Paris.'¹⁰

Born in a village in Haute-Marne in eastern France, Louise Michel was the illegitimate daughter of a domestic servant and a young man of vaguely noble title. Her mother and her father's parents raised her in a crumbling château near the village of Vroncourt-la-Côte. There she became interested in traditional customs, folk myths and legends. Increasingly hostile to Catholicism, she was influenced nonetheless by 'the shadowy depths of the churches, the flickering candles, and the beauty of the ancient chants'. As a child she gave fruit, vegetables and small sums to poor people; as a young adult she became a schoolteacher, first in a nearby village and then in Paris. With her oval face and 'a long, thin and tight-lipped mouth', she seemed to have hard, almost masculine traits. Michel is known to history as 'the Red Virgin'. She embraced the cause of women's rights, proclaiming that one could not separate 'the caste of women from humanity'.¹¹

When more horses finally arrived, some of the soldiers began to try to move more of the guns down from Montmartre. But women who were out in the neighbourhood had returned home to awaken their men, so what had been sparse gatherings of curious bystanders had now swelled into an angry crowd. Men, women and children blocked the soldiers' descent, trying to cut the horses' harnesses and hurling bottles and rocks at the troops. An observer saw 'women and children swarming up the hillside in a compact mass; the artillerymen tried in vain to fight their way through the crowd, but the waves of people engulfed everything, surging over the cannon-mounts, over the ammunition wagons, under the wheels, under the horses' feet, paralysing the advance of the riders who spurred on their mounts in vain. The horses reared and lunged forward, their sudden movement clearing the crowd, but the space was filled at once by a backwash created by the surging multitude.' A National Guardsman climbed onto a milestone and yelled, 'Cut the traces!' Men and women cut through the harnesses with knives. The artillerymen, quickly giving up on moving the cannons, came down from their horses and some began to fraternise with people in the crowd, accepting the meat, rolls and wine offered by women. Soldiers who abandoned the cannons and broke ranks were 'the object of frenetic ovations' from the crowd.¹²

On the eastern side of Montmartre, angry residents also prevented troops under the command of Lecomte from taking the cannons down the hill. The general was confident that a brigade commanded by General Susbille would attack from the other side of Montmartre, trapping the insurgents between them. When sentries reported that the National Guardsmen were advancing towards them, Lecomte confidently announced

that his troops would take care of them. But his soldiers, far from attempting to fight the insurgents, instead stopped and began to discuss the situation with guardsmen and other residents. An officer named Lalande even affixed a white handkerchief to his sword. At Buttes-Chaumont, troops awaited in vain the anticipated horses. National Guardsmen, however, turned out, constructed barricades, and the soldiers withdrew.

On Montmartre, General Lecomte stepped forward to take charge. The general ordered his troops three times to fire into the crowd of men, women and children. But they did not fire. A woman challenged the soldiers: 'Are you going to fire on us? On your brothers? On our husbands? On our children?' Another insulted them, reminding the line troops of their defeat at the hands of the Prussians. Lecomte threatened to shoot any man who refused to fire, asking if his soldiers 'were going to surrender to that scum'. Louise Michel recalled that a non-commissioned officer left the ranks, 'placed himself before his company and yelled, louder than Lecomte, "Turn up your rifle butts!" The soldiers obeyed . . . the Revolution was made.'¹³

Captain Lalande informed Lecomte that it was he who had to surrender. The general sent an officer down rue Lepic to bring back reinforcements, but troops charging a crowd there had been greeted with shots that killed another officer and wounded several of his men. National Guardsmen rushed forward and took Lecomte and several other officers prisoner, taking them to a police post at Château Rouge.¹⁴

Clemenceau was eager to obtain General Lecomte's release, fearing that he might be harmed, as a furious mob had gathered outside the police post. Guardsmen took Lecomte and a few other prisoners back to the modest house that served as the National Guard headquarters on rue de Rosiers, searching for members of the Central Committee of the National Guard who could decide what to do. But no one from the committee could be found: the members had departed, believing the prisoners to be safely held by the National Guard. Guardsmen arrived there with General Clément Thomas, who had preceded Aurelle de Paladines as commander of the National Guard, as prisoner. The crowd quickly recognised Thomas, reviled by working people for his role in the slaughter of insurgents during the June Days of 1848. He was wearing civilian clothes – and therefore taken to be a spy. The crowd of men and women pulled Thomas and Lecomte into a garden behind the building. There they were both shot, Lecomte after pleading for mercy on behalf of his wife and five children.¹⁵

The Central Committee of the National Guard moved into action, albeit somewhat belatedly due to uncertainty about what was going on. By 10.00 a.m. about a dozen members had gathered. They sent representatives into neighbourhoods where National Guard battalions were known to be hostile to the provisional government. Early in the afternoon guardsmen commanded by Émile Duval, the son of a laundress, occupied the Panthéon and Prefecture of Police. Eugène Varlin, a printer and socialist, led 1,500 guardsmen from Batignolles and Montmartre down into the *beaux quartiers*, controlling place Vendôme, where the National Guard headquarters stood in the midst of the conservative neighbourhood. That evening, a red flag flew from the Hôtel de Ville, where the Central Committee now gathered, for the moment the de facto government of the fledgling Paris Commune. What began as a spontaneous defence of National Guard cannons had quickly become an insurrection and then a revolution. As Benoît Malon, a member of the International, put it, 'never has a revolution so surprised revolutionaries'. Louise Michel proclaimed: 'The eighteenth of March could have belonged to the allies of kings, or to foreigners, or to the people. It was the people's.'¹⁶

Thiers realised that the army did not have enough troops to crush the insurrection. He first ordered Vinoy to pull his troops back behind the Seine and occupy the bridges on the Left Bank, and then ordered a complete evacuation of Paris by all government officials, followed by troops. Of about 4,000 policemen, more than 2,500 joined line troops heading for Versailles. Paris was left with virtually no officials or functionaries, no magistrates, no police. Many Parisians of means had already begun to desert their city. The next day, Thiers cut all correspondence between Paris and the provinces.¹⁷

During the February Revolution of 1848, Thiers had advised the Orléanist regime to move the army outside of Paris, regroup, and then return to crush the working-class insurgents. Prince Alfred Windischgraetz had done the same thing that same year in Vienna. With several hundred thousand French troops in prisoner-of-war camps in Germany, and the potential unreliability of many line troops, Thiers could not contemplate an immediate assault on Paris. He wanted time to rebuild his forces.

Thiers ordered the evacuation of troops from the forts of Mont Valérien, Issy, Vanves and Montrouge, each well beyond the ramparts of Paris. Soon after, he realised that giving up Mont-Valérien, south-west of Neuilly, had been a grave mistake, and it was reoccupied; troops turned back a half-hearted assault by National Guard forces. The officers of the

now twice-defeated army gathered in Versailles, shocked by events and utterly humiliated.

Raoul Rigault had returned to Paris on 18 February, the day after the National Assembly elected Thiers head of the executive authority. The police were looking for him and he lay low until mid-March. Having dined late in the Latin Quarter at the *Brasserie Glaser* the evening before, Rigault woke up late on 18 March to hear the news that the people of Montmartre had prevented the troops from carrying off the National Guard cannons, and had shot generals Lecomte and Thomas. The fervent disciple of revolution had missed the whole thing! Rigault ran to the Prefecture of Police, and, finding that Émile Duval had already assumed police functions there, pushed him out of the way and began to set up shop. Rigault then began to sign orders for the liberation of political prisoners. Blanquists were chomping at the bit, eager to organise a military march on Versailles. However, the Central Committee of the National Guard hesitated, as did Jacobins and many members of the International.

Montmartre, Belleville and other peripheral plebeian neighbourhoods took the victory on 18 March as their own, a revolution that would challenge the existing conservative provisional government. They poured down from the heights to parade triumphantly on the place de l'Hôtel de Ville and the boulevards of central Paris. Organisation and militancy would remain firmly based in the context of neighbourhood action.¹⁸

Edmond de Goncourt witnessed the explosion of popular joy and energy that erupted on 18 March: 'All around me people are talking of provocation and making fun of Thiers . . . The triumphant revolution seems to be taking possession of Paris: National Guards are swarming and barricades are being put up everywhere; naughty children scramble on top of them. There is no traffic; shops are closing.' The next day he walked near the Hôtel de Ville. No friend of ordinary people, he snarled:

You are overcome with disgust to see their stupid and abject faces, which triumph and drunkenness have imbued with a kind of radiant swinishness . . . for the moment France and Paris are under the control of workmen . . . How long will it last? Who knows? The unbelievable rules . . . the cohorts of Belleville throng our conquered boulevard . . . going along in the midst of a somewhat mocking astonishment which seems to embarrass them and makes them turn their victors' eyes towards the toes of their shoes, worn mostly without socks . . . The government is leaving the hands of those who have, to go into the

hands of those who have not . . . Is it possible that in the great law underlying changes here on earth the workers are for modern societies what the Barbarians were for ancient societies, convulsive agents of dissolution and destruction?¹⁹

Ernest Vizetelly described the most prosperous neighbourhoods of Paris as being invaded by men 'with faces such as were only seen on days of Revolution'.²⁰

Yet life in Paris in some ways went on as if nothing had changed. Shops opened the next day as usual, and in some neighbourhoods people simply walked around remaining barricades. Eugène Bersier, a Protestant pastor, recalled that no one could really believe that they were in the middle of an insurrection. He watched National Guard battalions from Belleville, Montmartre and the southern suburb of Montrouge, 'poor lost souls who believe that they have saved the Republic', parade through central Paris. A week later, Auguste Serrailier, a thirty-year-old shoemaker and member of the Council of Marx's International, reported that the only abnormal occurrence was the closing of the workshops – employers appeared to be organising a lock-out in order to undercut the Commune. Even the conservative historian Hippolyte Taine had to admit that nothing scary or dramatic had followed the people's victory of 18 March. He watched National Guardsmen playing *boules* and passing the hat for money to buy some sausage and a little wine.²¹

As drama unfolded on Montmartre, Paul Vignon, the son of a magistrate and himself a lawyer who had been a national guardsman during the Prussian siege, had taken his mother to the Gare Montparnasse so that she could return to their family home in the Norman town of Falaise. Returning to the Palace of Justice, he heard shouts coming from the direction of the quai de la Mégisserie. Then he learned what had happened up on Montmartre, far from his comfortable existence. He saw two gendarmes with torn shirts who had struggled with a crowd shouting for the Commune and against the army. Within hours most conservative national guardsmen had left their ranks. What was left of his National Guard unit, Vignon claimed, was only 'the lazy element' – those continuing to serve for the 1.50 francs per day that they received. Vignon contended that a kind of fever had come upon ordinary Parisians. The Franco-Prussian War had wrenched them away from their normal occupations and they now seemed to believe that no leaders were necessary in a world of total equality, without a 'ruling class' and in which the kind of luxury to which he was accustomed would be 'a stigma'.

Édouard, Paul's father, reported to his wife two days later that 'After the Prussians, now it's Belleville and Montmartre who want to stage their political drama.' For wealthy Parisians like Paul and Édouard Vignon, the insurgency was at first nothing to be too concerned about, just another Parisian episode with which to contend. Indeed, Paris seemed astonishingly calm, particularly their bourgeois *quartier* in central Paris, where faces were 'sad, gloomy'.

Paul briefly set about trying to organise conservative National Guardsmen who were 'frankly reactionary'. Édouard also believed it their duty 'to increase the number of *honnêtes gens*'. The Vignon family quickly adopted the vocabulary of social and spatial stigmatisation. They juxtaposed the Communard 'rabble' – for example 'the low-life of Belleville' – with the '*honnêtes gens*' of the upper classes in the fancy neighbourhoods. Édouard and his son would bide their time, and looked to Thiers and the National Assembly to put an end to this mess.²²

On 19 March, Émile Duval warned the Central Committee that resistance against what had transpired was afoot, particularly in the conservative First and Second Arrondissements. He demanded that steps be taken to prevent conservative National Guard units from reaching Versailles. Members of the Committee protested that they did not have a mandate to defend Paris, and refused to transform the body formally into even a provisional revolutionary authority. Yet they agreed to order detachments of guardsmen to assure security at key points, such as the Banque de France and the Tuileries Palace. Paris had to be defended.²³

Members of the Committee issued a proclamation ending the state of siege imposed by Thiers and Vinoy and called on Parisians to organise elections in order to assure the existence of the Republic. Although they were unwilling to formally serve as a provisional government, the Central Committee remained the only real authority, although some of its members were quite unknown to the average Parisian. François Jourde, a committee member from Auvergne who had been a clerk for a notary and then in a bank, later related the sense of surprise and confusion that had followed such a swift victory: 'We did not know what to do: we did not want to take possession of the Hôtel de Ville. We wanted to build barricades. We were very embarrassed by our authority.'²⁴

Édouard Moreau, a twenty-seven-year-old Parisian Blanquist who made artificial flowers, presided over the Central Committee. Moreau's fine features, including long blond hair, earned him the nickname 'the aristocrat'. The Committee also included the Blanquists Émile Eudes and

Duval. Rigault and other Blanquists would run the Prefecture of Police and looked to Alphonse Blanqui as a potential saviour and leader, despite the fact that he was a prisoner of the government of Versailles on an island near Morlaix in Brittany. Rigault put it this way: 'Nothing can be done without the Old One', Blanqui.²⁵

The Committee, led by Moreau, put forth a list of demands to the National Assembly in Versailles. They insisted that Parisians have the right to elect mayors of each of its twenty *arrondissements*; that the Prefecture of Police be abolished; that the army in Versailles be kept out of Paris; that the National Guard should have the right to elect its officers; that the moratorium on the payment of rents that the National Assembly had arbitrarily ended be continued; and finally that the National Assembly officially proclaim the Republic. Eudes proclaimed that since 18 March Paris 'has no other government than that of the people and this is the best one. Paris is free. Centralised authority no longer exists.' The concept of the Commune as a governing entity gained ground when the first issue of the *Journal Officiel de la Commune* appeared on 20 March. A stridently worded assessment congratulated 'the proletarians of the capital [who,] amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking the direction of public affairs into their own hands'. The term 'Commune', as we have seen, was in the air during the Prussian siege and after the French defeat. Now the victory of the men and women of Montmartre in preventing Thiers's troops from seizing cannons of the National Guard encouraged insurgent Parisians to believe that the creation of a progressive and even autonomous authority in the capital – the Commune of Paris – was within reach.²⁶

For the moment, however, the majority of *arrondissement* mayors and deputy mayors, and deputies representing Paris in the National Assembly, refused to meet with the Central Committee, believing that this would be tantamount to recognising it as a legitimate authority. A minority of the mayors, however, met with the Central Committee at the Hôtel de Ville, including Clemenceau, the mayor of the Eighteenth Arrondissement. Clemenceau insisted that the body did not represent Paris and tried to persuade its members to return cannons to the government of Thiers and recognise the authority of the existing mayors. He hoped that the latter could negotiate with the National Assembly. The more conservative *arrondissement* mayors limited their demands to achieving municipal autonomy.²⁷

The monarchist-dominated National Assembly met in a secret session on the evening of 22 March to determine how to respond to the uprising

in Paris. Thiers and Jules Grévy, a very conservative republican, dominated the proceedings. The monarchist right found support for their demand that calls for volunteers from the provinces be made to defend 'order and society'. The prevailing mood was reflected by one member, who insisted that 'The criminals who now dominate Paris have attacked Paris: now they attack society itself.' No concessions were to be made to 'a riot'. Thiers and Grévy made clear that they were willing to give the what they considered to be illegal, insurgent authority time to set itself up while a 'serious army' could be rebuilt in order to make legitimate a bloody repression. Thiers relished the fact that the possibility of civil war hung over the gathering. When someone challenged Thiers, asking if he would push Paris to civil war, shouts came from the Assembly: 'It has already begun! It's here!' The conservative National Assembly revolted against Paris, and not the other way around. Only days after the people of Paris had taken control of their city, Thiers and the National Assembly were readying for a war that they understood as 'a class war' between the bourgeoisie and Parisian workers.²⁸

Meanwhile many of those elite Parisians who would proudly take the title of 'the men of order' followed Thiers to Versailles or retreated to safer places outside the capital. Conservative republicans in Versailles who at first seemed in the difficult position of having to choose between a monarchical restoration and the Commune could now back Thiers, who promised to crush 'the vile multitude' in Paris he so detested.

For conservative republicans, the word 'Commune' had become a synonym for 'communism'. These so-called 'men of order' could convince themselves that the members and supporters of the Commune, dubbed the Communards, intended primarily to confiscate and divvy up the property of the wealthy. Thiers, like other anti-Communards, was convinced that members of the International were largely responsible for the insurrection of 18 March.²⁹

While Thiers and the National Assembly prepared to rebuild the army, counter-revolution was afoot in Paris. Thiers appointed the conservative Admiral Jean-Marie Saisset commander of the National Guard of Paris, a decision sure to outrage many ordinary Parisians. The Bonapartist faithful, the 'Society of the Friends of Order', and 'loyal' National Guardsmen began to gather around the Bourse, the Opera, and the elegant Grand Hôtel in Paris, rallying around Saisset. On 21 March, a demonstration of about 3,000 'Friends of Order' began on the boulevard des Capucines and marched through several boulevards and streets in conservative neighbourhoods. Versailles loyalists dominated the *quartiers* between the *grands*

boulevards down to the market of Saint-Honoré, and around the Palais-Royal, the Banque de France and rue Montmartre. Saisset organised another demonstration at place Vendôme the following day. The choice of location was provocative – in front of the headquarters of the National Guard. When Saisset was about to speak, shots in his general direction were fired by counter-demonstrators. Twelve-year-old Gaston Cerfbeer, living on rue Saint-Honoré near rue Royale, looked down to see ‘men of order . . . running like madmen, beneath our windows’.³⁰

About twelve people were killed and a number of others were injured in the melee. Saisset’s disorganisation and lack of charisma, as well as rumours that key Orléanists hoped the demonstrations would constitute a first step towards a restoration, helped bring the bloody incident to a close. Most Parisians rejected any possible return to a monarchy. But rather than putting an end to the counter-revolution, the deaths only solidified strong anti-Communard sentiment among conservatives remaining in Paris.

In the meantime, the National Assembly refused to put the name ‘Republic’ on its proclamations. The government immediately adopted a discourse of denigration, with descriptions of Parisians as ‘wretches’, ‘brigands’, ‘pillagers’ and ‘bandits’. In mid-April, the Assembly reacted to the claims of Paris with a new law on municipalities, stating that in the future the capital would still have no mayor, but instead would be under the direct administration of the prefect of the Seine. Municipal councilmen would be named for five-year terms, responsible only to the central government that appointed them.³¹

Paris’s insurrection stirred some provincial cities. Crowds in Lyon had proclaimed the Republic in August 1870 before this had occurred in Paris on 4 September, also reflecting political radicalisation during the last years of the empire. Demonstrators called for continued war against Prussia, municipal autonomy and social reform. On 22 March, representatives from Lyon, Bordeaux, Rouen, Marseille and several other cities met with the Central Committee to listen to an account of the Parisian movement for rights. That day, insurgents seized power in Lyon. Marseille, Narbonne, Saint-Étienne, a centre of manufacturing, and the small industrial town of Le Creusot rose up on 24 March, followed by Limoges in early April. All proclaimed short-lived ‘communes’. Benoît Malon and militant socialist, feminist and novelist André Léo penned ‘Appeal to the Workers of the Countryside’, 110,000 copies of which reached the provinces. ‘Brothers,’ went the text, ‘they are fooling you. Our interests are the same!’³²

Some prominent moderate Parisian republicans, such as former deputy Édouard Lockroy, who was a member of the municipal council and had represented the *département* of the Seine in the National Assembly, and Jean-Baptiste Millière, another deputy, joined Clemenceau in attempting to achieve a compromise with Thiers. However on 23 March, Thiers turned away without compromise the delegation of mayors and deputies who represented Paris. He was playing for time, saying 'Once already I have pulled France drowning out of a revolution; I am not young enough to do it a second time.'³³

Three groups, the Ligue d'Union républicaine des droits de Paris, Union nationale du commerce et de l'industrie, and the Freemasons, still pressed for conciliation, each hoping that recognition by the Versailles government of the Republic's existence and an affirmation of the rights of Paris would lead to a negotiated settlement. Thiers insisted that because the Commune had no legitimacy, there was nothing to negotiate. To the Union nationale du commerce et de l'industrie, claiming to represent 6,000 merchants and manufacturers, Thiers demanded that the Communards give up their arms, in other words, surrender.³⁴

The term 'Commune' had in these days several meanings. The Manifesto of the Committee of the Twenty Arrondissements, released several days after events of 18 March, put forward its definition of 'the Commune . . . [as] the base of all political states, as the family is the embryo of societies. [The Commune] should be autonomous . . . [with] its sovereignty complete, just like the individual in the middle of the city.' With an eye towards economic development and the guarantee of security, Paris should 'federate itself with all other communes or associations of communes that make up the nation . . . It is this idea . . . which has just triumphed on 18 March 1871.'³⁵

However, much more than municipal autonomy was at stake. Many Parisians believed that the assertion of municipal rights represented the first step towards achieving a 'democratic and social Republic'. The manifesto asked for the organisation of 'a system of communal insurance against all social risks', including unemployment and bankruptcy, as well as a systematic investigation into all possibilities for procuring capital and credit for individual workers in order to end endless 'pauperism'.³⁶ Thus while some militants limited their demands to municipal rights, others demanded meaningful social reforms.

On 23 March, the Paris branch of the International Workingmen's Association threw its support behind the Commune. Its proclamation,

written by Albert Theisz, a bronze-worker, optimistically asserted that 'the independence of the Commune will mean a freely discussed contract which will put an end to class conflict and bring about social equality'. It also echoed prevalent republican demands put forth during the Second Empire: obligatory, free and secular education; the right of assembly and to form associations; and municipal authority over the armed forces, police and public health. As the socialist printer Eugène Varlin had put it, 'political revolution and social reforms are linked, and cannot go one without the other'.³⁷

The Protestant minister Élie Reclus captured the hope of many Communards that social reforms could bring them better lives: 'Lazare, always starving, is no longer content with the crumbs that fall from the table of the rich, and now he has dared ask for his part of the feast.' Like his anarchist geographer brother Élisée, Reclus believed that the future of humanity lay in a close connection with nature, without a state. He believed that if workers could organise themselves into associations of producers, they would eventually be able to emancipate themselves from bosses. Yet, although some 300,000 Parisians were now without work in the wake of the war and siege, various associations of workers bravely started up. At the Council of Federated Trade Unions an orator asked, 'What difference does it make to me that we are victorious over Versailles, if we don't find the answer to the social problem, if the worker remains in the same conditions?'³⁸

Louis Barron, the son of a washerwoman, a former soldier, and writer, wanted 'a social revolution' so long awaited by many in his generation. He described the world of work from which the Commune took its strength:

The vast working-class faubourgs, by which one slowly reaches Butte Montmartre or Buttes-Chaumont, these Monts-Aventins of Paris, reflect the mysterious, tumultuous and sad movement of these industrial neighbourhoods . . . Ordinary people live in these streets, mixing together, walking about, discussing, arguing, killing time. For these thousands of men used to working with tools every day in order to earn enough to eat, unemployment, even if absolute famine is not a consequence, is as difficult as if utter dark impoverishment followed in its wake.³⁹

Hundreds of thousands of Parisian workers would look to the Commune to bring out reforms that would improve their lives.

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Municipal elections, postponed for four days while some of the mayors unsuccessfully sought a negotiated settlement with Versailles, were held on 26 March. The goal was to elect the governing council of the Commune. Rigault stood as a candidate in the generally reactionary Eighth Arrondissement, which included the Church of the Madeleine, where some of the wealthiest families married and held baptisms, and the Champs-Élysées.⁴⁰ He assumed that his reputation and newly acquired status as head of the police could win him the election even in a reactionary district, and it did.

The elections reflected the increasingly divided social and political geography of Paris. They were weighted by population, with the plebeian Eleventh Arrondissement – the most populous, with almost 150,000 residents – and the Eighteenth each electing seven people, while the Sixteenth – the smallest with 42,000 residents – would have but two representatives. Only about half of men voted, in part due to the fact that thousands had fled the city, but also because many were unfamiliar with the candidates or were dissuaded by the fact that Thiers had called for people not to vote.

The candidates of the revolutionary Left did well in the plebeian *arrondissements* of eastern and above all north-eastern Paris, where Blanquists, members of the International, and Jacobins were a majority. In Belleville, the anti-clerical national guardsman Gabriel Ranvier, the son of a shoemaker and a clerk, was re-elected mayor of the Twentieth Arrondissement, where he became known as ‘the Christ of Belleville’. He was known for drinking to political change with syrup and not wine, was a frequent speaker in the warehouses of *quartiers populaires*, and had spent time in prison for his role in the attempted insurrection of 31 October. Like others of similar background, he was determined that Paris should lead the way in the struggle for a just republic.⁴¹

Those now wielding authority in the Commune were men with little or no administrative experience, but they stepped together – debating and quarrelling from the beginning – into the unknown. No dominant figure emerged to lead the Commune, and problems of overlapping authority and rivalries persisted. When the Commune issued decrees, it was up to the mayors, deputy mayors, police and national guardsmen in each *arrondissement* to enforce them. Of course, not all local mayors and police were willing supporters of the Commune, which meant that there were limits to the Commune’s effective authority and that it had to rely on officials, policemen and national guardsmen no matter how republican they were.⁴²

The Commune's first and most pressing task, however, was defending Paris against the Army of Versailles, which was readying for a fight against Communards. Debates raged between 'realists' and 'idealists', as, much to the chagrin of 'idealists', who were eager to establish a just society, 'realists' insisted that no real reforms, social or political, could be achieved with determined enemies at the gate. The first decree of the new administrative body of the Commune on 29 March reminded citizens that they were 'masters of [their] own lives', warning that 'criminals' were 'fostering a hotbed of monarchist conspiracy at the very gates of the city. They are planning to unleash civil war.'⁴³

On 28 March, the victorious new authority in the French capital officially proclaimed the Paris Commune at the Hôtel de Ville, as drums, bugles and artillery salvos fired into the air from the nearby quay saluted victory over tyranny. The newly elected members of the governmental council of the Commune stood on a platform, while the National Guard marched by a vast, excited crowd. The colour red was everywhere – scarves, belts, cockades, and the flag waving from the Hôtel de Ville. Rigault had trimmed his beard and was shockingly well-dressed, revelling in his status as head of the police. Jules Vallès described the proclamation of the Commune as 'making up for twenty years of Empire, six months of defeat and betrayals'. The Commune had from the beginning the overwhelming support of most Parisians.⁴⁴

The Central Committee of the National Guard had announced that with the elections of 26 March it was going to cede power to those elected to the Commune. Yet the very next day the Central Committee began to reorganise, after sixteen of its members had been elected to the Commune. The Central Committee, which continued to hold regular meetings, saw itself as the 'guardian of the revolution'. It warned Parisians to be wary of those favoured by fortune, because only rarely did they consider 'the workers as brothers'. Arguably a kind of dual sovereignty existed: the Central Committee of the Federation of the National Guard, which had been formally established on 20 March, and the 'Commune', the elected governing body of the Commune proclaimed on 28 March.⁴⁵

The Commune immediately faced challenges both internal and external. First and most immediate, it required funds to operate. Second, not everyone who supported the Commune agreed on the extent of the transformation in Paris it was to oversee – political divisions would remain. Third, while German forces surrounded the northern and eastern ramparts and forts, Thiers's army, headquartered at Versailles, held the territory to

the south and west of Paris. The Germans posed no immediate threat, but Thiers's army was already planning its attack on Paris.

How was the Commune to find the money to pay national guardsmen 1.50 francs a day for their service, as well as the many municipal employees? The Commune also had to find a way to make good on its promise to finance some care for the poor. As in other cities and towns in France, the bulk of municipal revenues came from money collected at the *octrois* (customs barriers) that surrounded Paris. Monies seized at the Hôtel de Ville when the old regime disappeared into the night counted for something. But many more financial resources were required.

The Commune named François Jourde as delegate for Finance. On 19 March Jourde and Eugène Varlin went to the Bank of France to ask politely for a loan of 700,000 francs. This they received. The Commune also received a credit of well over 16 million francs – though it was a paltry sum compared with the 258 million francs credit Versailles received from the Bank of France, making possible the reconstitution of the French army. The Rothschild banking family also loaned money to the Commune.⁴⁶ The Commune remained attached to legalism and did not confiscate funds in the Bank of France, which it easily could have done, but it did begin to mint its own coins in mid-April.⁴⁷

For the moment, the Commune's provisional authority proposed no concrete economic or political programme other than affirming that France was now a republic. Yet the Commune immediately took important measures in the interests of working- and middle-class Parisians. It forbade the expulsion of renters unable to pay their rent, which reassured those who had been frustrated and angered by the National Assembly's sudden abolition of the moratorium on rents that had kept people in their homes during the siege. Gustave Flaubert, for one, expressed his indignation as a property owner who wanted rents owed paid immediately. He would not have been happy to hear of the comment by a man who informed his landlord in the Eleventh Arrondissement that 'the Commune would triumph, and would put renters in the place of landlords'. The Commune reassured businesses by coming up with a compromise in the interest of debtors and creditors, phasing repayments for those in debt over three years, whereas the Versailles government had allowed only three months to pay back money owed. It suspended the sale of items that had been exchanged for cash at the Municipal Pawnshop, measures important to so many Parisians.

The Commune Council, which included about sixty-five men, many of whom were also officials in their own *arrondissements*, met fifty-seven times

during the Commune's existence. Overlapping administrations, committees, delegates, ideological differences and personal rivalries, however, undermined its efforts.⁴⁸ (What reassured Élie Reclus least about the Commune was its governing council.) In each of the *mairies* of the *arrondissements*, smaller versions of the meetings at the Hôtel de Ville took place, with each mayor, deputy mayor and members of the commissions overseeing local affairs. The very structure of what was in essence a federation of *arrondissements* meant that coordinating a unified policy at the level of the Commune proved difficult, if not impossible. National Guard units and the existence of the Central Committee of the Federation of the National Guard served to decentralise authority and further complicate coordination of policies ordered by the Commune itself. From the beginning, the Commune was plagued by competing authorities and two opposing visions of the Commune. On the one hand, Proudhonists, who were anarchists and therefore opposed to the very existence of states, saw the Commune as essentially embodying popular democracy and municipal autonomy. The Jacobins, meanwhile, favoured a more authoritarian and realistic structure that seemed increasingly necessary given the challenging military situation.⁴⁹

Further diffusing its authority, the Commune established executive 'commissions', something like the equivalent of ministries, each run by a 'delegate'. Commissions were to convene twice a day at the Hôtel de Ville, long and increasingly contentious meetings that often lasted well into the night. The meetings wasted considerable time discussing issues of little or absolutely no importance. A few members seemed caught up in the ceremonial aspects of their limited authority. In an effort to dispel this emphasis on appearance and ceremony, Varlin suggested that the Commune refuse to pay for the fancy uniform complete with military stripes ordered by Eudes. He explained, 'The Commune does not have money for luxurious clothing.'⁵⁰

The Commune's administrative body quickly decided that it was not democratic to call someone minister of war, so he became 'Citizen Delegate to the Ministry of War'. Besides 'War', the other commissions were 'Subsistence', 'Finance', 'Foreign Affairs', 'Public Services', 'Education', 'General Security', 'Justice' and 'Labour and Exchange'. The latter was headed by Léo Frankel, a small, bespectacled Hungarian watchmaker and member of the International. Speaking French with a strong accent, Frankel lived near faubourg Saint-Antoine, in the heart of artisanal Paris. He insisted that, because workers had made the revolution of 18 March, the Commune would have no meaning if it did not do something for them.⁵¹

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While the Commune was busy setting up its government, Adolphe Thiers was beginning to rebuild the French army in Versailles.⁵² This would be a challenge. More than 300,000 soldiers and officers, who had surrendered at Sedan and Metz, were still interned in the German states. The Army of the East, camped in Switzerland, largely consisted of Mobile Guard soldiers awaiting demobilisation. By early April, the number of troops reached only 55,000, including those released from German internment, and the three corps had taken the appropriate name of the Army of Versailles. The Volunteers of the Seine provided another 6,000 men. Yet Thiers would bide his time, convinced that well more than 100,000 might be needed.⁵³

Marshal Patrice de MacMahon seemed the perfect commander-in-chief for the Army of Versailles. A Legitimist hoping for a Bourbon restoration, MacMahon, a decorated veteran of campaigns of conquest and slaughter in Algeria, shared the belief at Versailles that the Commune threatened social order. The marshal's surrender at Sedan had only somewhat compromised his sterling reputation, for he had been wounded early in the battle.

On 6 April Thiers named as commanders Paul de Ladmirault, Ernest de Cissey, François du Barail, Justin Clinchant and Félix Douay. Thiers appointed Joseph Vinoy, who had led the unsuccessful effort to capture the National Guard cannons, to command the reserve army. All were politically conservative, including two Legitimists, two Bonapartists and a conservative republican (Ladmirault). The French officer corps remained upper-class and status-proud, retaining the belief that noble blood guaranteed dedication and competence. Senior French officers had rallied to Louis Napoleon and then to his second incarnation as Napoleon III, in part because they feared republicans and socialists. It should come as no surprise, then, that they were eager to take up arms against the Parisian Communards.⁵⁴

Whereas conservative republican Jules Simon had described the Versaillais army in its first weeks as being 'like a Tartar horde', officers now imposed discipline. Cases of insubordination and, above all, politically motivated dissent – such as when soldiers arriving from Bordeaux shouted for the Commune – were dealt with harshly. Units considered even vaguely sympathetic to Paris were sent to far-flung duty in France or the colonies.

Morale among soldiers, so devastated just a few months earlier, improved dramatically. It helped that Thiers took a personal interest in improving living conditions for troops, increasing their wine rations

fourfold, and tripling that of eau-de-vie. Troops were also bombarded by propaganda attacking the Communards. After first preventing soldiers access to newspapers, the National Assembly in April voted to provide troops copies of *Le Gaulois* and *Le Soir*, which denounced the Commune for challenging the regime of property, religion, social hierarchy and authority. The Communards were presented as the dregs of society, ex-convicts, drunks, vagabonds and thieves, foreigners turned loose by virtue of fiendish plots organised by the International, perhaps in cahoots with Germany.⁵⁵

Once the German Empire and the provisional government of France had signed the Treaty of Frankfurt on 10 May – under the terms of which France lost Alsace and much of Lorraine to Germany, and would have to pay off an enormous indemnity of 5 billion francs, and recognise William I as emperor of Germany – Bismarck released captured French soldiers to join the Army of Versailles. These troops would make up a quarter of the force of 130,000 men available to Thiers. Officers were eager to restore the pride of the French army after the abject humiliation of the catastrophic war against Prussia, although some who had served in the Army of National Defence were squeezed out. With their professional careers on the line, returning officers quickly hitched their wagons to the Versailles caravan. Thiers had no military experience, but this in no way dissuaded him from trying to impose his will on the commanders of the Army of Versailles. Each morning he insisted on meeting with MacMahon and the others, but not with their titular superior, Adolphe Le Flô, minister of war, nor with Vinoy, whose reputation had been stained by the events of 18 March.⁵⁶

Thiers and the Army of Versailles's planned invasion of Paris would not be easy. The city had held out for more than four months during the Prussian siege against an imposing army. It was protected by a wall that ran around its circumference, with ninety-four fortified bastions interspersed. Each could house cannons and machine guns. A moat thirty feet deep and forty-five feet across provided an additional serious obstacle to any invading force. During the Prussian siege, the Government of National Defence had constructed additional fortifications beyond the south-western side of the ramparts, using embankments provided by the railway that ran around the circumference of Paris. Drawbridges could close the gates of the city.

Moreover, a series of exterior forts had been built during the July Monarchy: Issy, Montrouge, Vanves, Bicêtre and Ivry. Connected in places by trenches and redoubts, they were controlled by Commune

forces, with the major exception of the enormous fort of Mont-Valérien west of Paris, which had been retaken by the Versaillais. Ironically these forts had been constructed at the instigation of Thiers. The placement of the forts had generated heated debate, as republican critics noted that their location seemed to reflect a preoccupation with firing into Paris, against insurgent workers – such as those who had risen up on several occasions following the Revolution of 1830 – more than offering useful defence against an invading army. The German army controlled the areas beyond the northern and eastern walls of Paris, including the exterior forts (with the exception of Vincennes to the east, held by the Communards). Supposed German neutrality gave the Communards the advantage of not having to worry about a Versaillais attack from those directions.⁵⁷

The Commune delegate for war who would have to prepare for a Versaillais attack was Gustave Cluseret, a Parisian-born graduate of the elite military school of St Cyr. Though not yet fifty, Cluseret had impressive military experience: he had been wounded in Algeria and fought as a commander of the Mobile Guard against the insurgents during the June Days of 1848. He then moved to the left and was placed on inactive duty before fighting for the North in the American Civil War, after which he became an American citizen. Increasingly committed to the social revolution, he returned to France in 1867 and was briefly jailed in 1868 after writing an article that displeased the imperial authorities.

Cluseret had, in the words of Louis Rossel, another Commune commander, ‘a coarsely handsome face’ but was ‘curt, uncivil in his manner’, leading to accusations that he was dictatorial in his methods. One of the commander’s secretaries described a mood of ‘perpetual improvisation, fundamental incoherence, a chaos trying in vain to organise itself and . . . a mob-scene where everyone commands and no one obeys’. But he understood the daunting problems of trying to defend Paris with undisciplined National Guard forces vulnerable to the indecision and arguments of their commanders. The National Guard was organised into companies formed within *arrondissements*, bringing together neighbours, work-mates and friends. Each company now elected a delegate who was to serve as something of a ‘political and military policeman’, searching for disloyal officers, with the right to call meetings to discuss matters deemed important.⁵⁸ That National Guard companies elected such delegates added to the layers of command and increased the difficulty of the tasks of the overall commander.

Cluseret believed that, if the National Guard could hold off the Versaillais, some sort of negotiated settlement with the government at Versailles could be reached. The first step, however, was ensuring that the National Guard was ready for the task at hand. With that in mind, he reorganised some National Guard units and reminded *arrondissement* authorities that he had ultimate authority over battalions. On 7 April, a decree obliged all men between nineteen and forty years to serve in the National Guard. Cluseret urged guardsmen to police their neighbourhoods and force men avoiding service to join the Guard. The Delegate for War created a war council in each National Guard legion, a kind of court-martial, with the goal of imposing discipline and thus countering attempts by the Versaillais to subvert morale. A court-martial tried one commander, who stood accused of refusing to lead his men against line troops at Neuilly. He was condemned to death, but never executed.⁵⁹

Cluseret's attempts to create a real army out of National Guard troops was made more difficult by the limits of his own authority and an increasingly obstructionist National Guard leadership. He denounced the meddling of the Central Committee of the National Guard, which accentuated the division of authority undermining the Commune. The Central Committee continued to send out commands to *arrondissement* municipalities, ignoring Cluseret's efforts to centralise his authority. A spate of official proclamations appeared, some extremely contradictory. When on one occasion Cluseret assumed that 1,500 national guardsmen would be awaiting his orders at Gare Saint-Lazare, he found only 200, 'who did not want to march'. Only about 80,000 men were ready to fight by mid-May, if that.⁶⁰

Cluseret anticipated that Thiers's army would attack the western gates at Point-du-Jour, Auteuil and Passy. With this in mind, he established a battery at Trocadéro, and another near Passy at the Château de la Muette, not far from the Bois-de-Boulogne. Yet, during the Versaillais siege, it became clear that they did no real damage to the Versaillais forces.⁶¹

In late March, the Versaillais sent out an exploratory patrol towards the ramparts and then well beyond the southern fortifications to assess Communard defences. Thiers believed it would take thirty days to have control of the immediate area around the ramparts and to set up cannons there. He remained committed to blasting the ramparts with cannon fire in preparation for an assault, insisting on selecting the targets.⁶²

The first fighting took place on 30 March, just two days after the Commune was proclaimed, when Versaillais troops moved towards

Courbevoie, which lies across the Seine from Neuilly, on an exploratory mission. Coming upon a small Communard perimeter post, Versaillais line troops hesitated. General Gaston Galliffet immediately ordered the artillery to fire, and, when they grumbled, he harangued them, pistol in hand. He then charged forward on his horse, taking some prisoners, as Communard guardsmen fled. Versaillais soldiers grabbed a red flag and threw it at Galliffet's feet in triumph. The general's ability to rally the morale of his troops may have been a turning point; the army, at first unwilling to attack their fellow Frenchman, now seemed prepared for an assault on the Communards. Thiers ordered Galliffet's battalion to return without attempting to take the pont de Neuilly and Porte Maillot, but the skirmish had the intended effect. Commune forces retreated in a panic, while the army's performance reassured Thiers. He sent off a telegram to provincial authorities informing them that 'the organisation of one of the finest professional armies ever possessed by France is being completed at Versailles; good citizens can take heart'.

On 2 April, Thiers ordered two army brigades, backed by artillery and commanded by Galliffet, to attack a concentration of national guardsmen at the Rond-Point at Courbevoie. A military surgeon general called Pasquier went forward to negotiate with the Communards. Taking him for a colonel in the gendarmerie because of his uniform, the Communard side shot and killed Pasquier. The fighting that followed between the Communards and Thiers's army ended with a Versaillais victory, but, because Thiers's troops then fell back, some Communards conceived of the encounter as a victory. It was anything but that, as the Army of Versailles now held Courbevoie, a key point in the defence of Paris. Pasquier's death became an early cornerstone of Versaillais propaganda.⁶³

About thirty Communards were taken prisoner at Courbevoie, as *fédérés* – the name coming from the Federation of the National Guard – returned in haste to Paris, reaching avenue de Neuilly and then Porte Maillot. Vinoy's orders were unambiguous: all soldiers, men from the Mobile Guard, or sailors taken prisoner, were to be shot. When news of such executions reached the Hôtel de Ville, the Council of the Commune decided to order a major *sortie* against the Versaillais. The Blanquists Eudes and Émile Duval were the principal proponents for an attack. Late on 2 April, the Commune informed the National Guard that 'royalist conspirators' had attacked, launching civil war.⁶⁴

The willingness, even eagerness of the Versaillais troops to carry out summary executions of captured Communards marked an early turning point in the history of the Paris Commune. It left little doubt in the minds

of determined Communards that the government and armies of Adolphe Thiers were capable of unrestrained violence and that Paris had to be defended at all costs.

The Commune's leadership quickly assembled a force that may have numbered 20,000 but was probably fewer. At 5.00 a.m. on 3 April, four columns marched out of Paris towards Versailles, two from the right side: one, commanded by Jules Bergeret, was to go around Mont-Valérien and the other, under Gustave Flourens, to go across pont d'Asnières. A third column, under the command of Eudes, was to march through Issy and Meudon, while a fourth, commanded by Duval, would move through Châtillon. Thiers's line troops were ready, having been informed by spies in Paris.⁶⁵

One Parisian who was on his way out of the city took note of the disordered and paltry forces that were marching towards Versailles. A colonel in the French army, who had managed to go back and forth to Versailles, had decided that it would be 'prudent' to return definitely to the capital of the Bourbons. He had heard someone refer to him as a *mouchard* (police spy) and believed that his comings and goings were being noted. As the colonel prepared to leave Paris, a 'great rumour' swept down the boulevards that Communard forces were going to move on Versailles. The colonel watched the national guardsmen leave in near-total disorder, each carrying some sausage, bread and a litre of wine. Some were drunk and singing as they went along. Resourceful merchants plunged into their ranks, selling strong eau-de-vie. He could hear some guardsmen shout out that 'Père Thiers' should be hung. National guardsmen assured him that they would be 100,000 in number. They seemed far fewer than that.⁶⁶

Communard leaders had reassured the National Guard that the Versaillais soldiers would not fight and that they would point their rifles to the ground, as some troops had done on 18 March on Montmartre. But now every sign indicated that the line troops would indeed fight. Once beyond the ramparts, Communard fighters faced incessant shelling by Versaillais cannons firing from the heights of Mont Valérien. Only the column commanded by Eudes had any success, but then had to fall back on Clamart late in the afternoon because of insufficient artillery cover.⁶⁷

Emile Duval and Gustave Flourens were captured during the fighting. Flourens had taken refuge in an *auberge*. Gendarmes burst in and (falsely) accused him of having shot a gendarme who had come earlier looking for Communards. A gendarme who recognised Flourens dragged him outside and hacked him to death on the banks of the Seine. The loss of Flourens, a highly educated and energetic force within the Commune, was

disastrous. A general had promised that Communard fighters who surrendered would be saved. But when Vinoy arrived and asked who commanded the *fédérés*, the general barked out orders that Duval and his chief-of-staff should be immediately shot. A soldier removed Duval's boots from his body and yelled 'Who wants Duval's boots?' as he rode away. As the Communard columns fell back, Galliffet ordered at least three other prisoners shot.⁶⁸

Sutter-Laumann, the young socialist living on Montmartre, heard in Paris that Vinoy's forces had moved against the *rond-point* of Courbevoie and that captured national guardsmen had been executed. He returned hurriedly to Montmartre to see if his battalion had been summoned to action and found his neighbourhood in a state of alarm. Drums and trumpets were sounding 'with a lugubrious air that made one shudder'. He learned that his unit, which included his father, a corporal, had left two hours earlier. Sutter-Laumann caught up with them along the Seine. No one seemed to have the slightest idea where they were heading. Yet rumour had thousands of guardsmen moving on Versailles. Could the taking of Versailles not be assured?

In the distance, they could see the silhouette of Mont-Valérien. Suddenly its cannons opened up. They approached Meudon, its château and park stretching behind it, with Fort d'Issy off to the left. Amid fighting and losses, they reached the village of Clamart and were greeted with machine-gun fire. The National Guard battalion retreated as it had arrived, in chaos, and then was ordered to march to Châtillon. Sutter-Laumann decided to return to the village of Issy. Absolutely exhausted, he came upon guardsmen amusing themselves with target practice, even as Versaillais troops seemed headed in their direction. It was there that Sutter-Laumann learned of the fiasco at Châtillon, and the killing of Flourens and Duval.⁶⁹

Sutter-Laumann and other colleagues found themselves under attack between Vanves and Issy. Their numbers fell from fifty to thirty, and then to about eight, as guardsmen scurried off to safety. By miracle, he managed to meet up with his father, separated from his own battalion. They made it back to Paris together. For his part, Sutter-Laumann was now convinced that the defeat of the Commune was inevitable. The *sortie* of perhaps as many as 20,000 national guardsmen, supported by the forts of Issy and Vanves, had been unable to dislodge two or three regiments of Versaillais line troops.⁷⁰

The result was an overall disaster and the Communard forces retreated into Paris. On 4 April, the Versaillais launched a counter-attack against

the columns of Duval and Eudes, capturing the plateau of Châtillon and the pont de Neuilly. For the moment Communard forces still held the forts of Issy, Montrouge, Bicêtre and Ivry. But, as of the evening of 12 April, the Versaillais held Sèvres, Châtillon, Meudon and Saint-Cloud. The Commune had lost about 3,000 fighters killed or captured.

Despite its defeat at the hands of Versaillais troops and the unforeseen challenges of governing Paris, Communard confidence still abounded in the early weeks of spring. Louis Barron remembered: 'The Parisian movement . . . is carried along purely by its own momentum . . . I recklessly allow myself to be swept along in its current . . . I hardly ever think of the dangers of the morrow.' Barron had to 'admit that the cheerful bravado of the participants, their frivolous chatter, their wildly ostentatious dress, their taste for brilliant colours, plumed hats and impassioned speeches all help to distract me from my brooding fears'.⁷¹ With Thiers reconstituting the French army in the royal château at Versailles, there was lots indeed to fear.

CHAPTER 3

Masters of Their Own Lives

PARIS WAS FREE. ORDINARY PEOPLE FROM *QUARTIERS POPULAIRES* strolled through western Paris's fancy neighbourhoods, which many of them had never seen before unless they had been employed as domestics or day labourers. Some working families who had been expelled from central neighbourhoods by Haussmann's grand projects reappropriated streets they had once known very well. But with Thiers readying his troops in Versailles, how long could it last?

On Easter Sunday, the Jardins du Luxembourg seemed as crowded to Ernest Vizetelly 'as in the calmest days of peace'. And so were the principal boulevards of Paris, at least until cafés were ordered to shut at 11.00 p.m. In many ways, during the first half of April, life in Paris seemed to go on very much as before. The Louvre and Bibliothèque Nationale reopened. The Bourse carried on, despite the fact that most of the big investors had left Paris. The Café de Madrid, Vizetelly observed, was 'swarming with delegates and staff officers'.¹

Concerts held in the Tuileries Gardens celebrated the Commune. Louis Barron noted the gatherings' social mix, bringing together elderly proletarians and 'the white and fat figures of well-nourished bourgeois, along with the little, laughing faces of young women'. He was amused seeing people from all social classes greeting each other enthusiastically '*Ah! Citoyenne . . . Ah! Citoyen!*' More surprisingly, the Tuileries Palace, where Napoleon III and his family had lived so recently, had been opened to the public, with the entry fee of fifty centimes going towards the care of those wounded fighting the Versaillais. Women flocked to the apartments of the Empress, imagining the luxurious life Eugénie led there. Those hostile to the Commune were likely to miss the continued laughter of

young children as they watched the Guignol puppets at the lower end of the Champs-Élysées.²

The Commune was something of a 'permanent feast' of ordinary people who celebrated their freedom by appropriating the streets and squares of Paris. Revolutionary songs echoed, well entrenched in the collective memory. *Le peuple* (the people) of Paris sang *La Marseillaise*, *La Chant du départ* and *La Carmagnole*. The Commune placed enormous importance on political symbolism, and the destruction of several symbols of 'reaction' and 'injustice' took place in a festival-like atmosphere that made it possible for some to forget about an increasingly grim situation. Édouard Moriac remembered 'everyone wanted to see the spectacle of the day' as Parisians rushed to see the cannons being hauled off to battle, forgetting, perhaps, that a clash with Thiers's troops was all but inevitable.³

In one such display of symbolic destruction, national guardsmen from the Eleventh Arrondissement burnt a guillotine at place Voltaire on 7 April, just down rue de la Roquette where executions took place every year. Several thousand people were there. Leighton watched: 'When nothing remained but a heap of glowing ashes, the crowd shouted with joy; and for my own part, I fully approved of what had just been done as well as of the approbation of the spectators.'⁴

One reflection of popular excitement about and engagement with the Commune was the almost frenetic proliferation of newspapers, brochures, pamphlets, political posters, manifestos, wall posters and caricatures that flooded Paris. Ninety newspapers appeared during the Commune, including the Jacobin *Le Vengeur* and the Proudhonist *La Commune*. *La Sociale* was largely the work of André Léo, aided by Maxime Vuillaume. Other newspapers published only a few editions. Jules Vallès's *Le Cri du peuple* turned out 50,000 or 60,000 copies per issue, sometimes more. Boys wearing red caps peddled *Le Bonnet Rouge* on the boulevards.⁵

Père Duchêne, which published as many as 60,000 copies a day, was one of the more popular newspapers, though its tone, insults and sheer vulgarity offended many loyal to the Commune.⁶ As its namesake during the French Revolution, *Père Duchêne* borrowed the biting argot of working-class Parisians. It adopted the revolutionary calendar that had begun in 1792, so 1871 was the year 79. On 3 Germinal, *Père Duchêne* denounced 'the reactionary good-for-nothings [*jean-foutres*] who spread disorder in Paris'. Yet, despite the violence of the newspaper's denunciation of wealthy men of property, Vuillaume, another anti-imperial militant who had written his first piece for the newspaper in 1869, called for class

collaboration. His articles, at least, reflected the sentiments of most Parisians, who read newspapers and wall posters while discussing politics and the current situation, but did so in good order and for the most part good humour.

The publication of so many newspapers during the Commune must be set against the censorship of others. Just as General Joseph Vinoy had shut down a spate of newspapers less than a week before the Commune, the Central Committee in late March banned *Le Figaro* and *Le Gaulois*, closely tied to Thiers. At least twenty-seven newspapers were shut down after 18 March. On 5 May, it was the turn of *France*, *Le Temps* and *Le Petit Journal*, and later ten more disappeared.⁷

There were signs, too, of a new efflorescence of art during the Commune. Claiming authority given him following the proclamation of the Republic on 4 September, the great painter Gustave Courbet had announced on 18 March, coincidentally, the convocation of an assembly of artists. Courbet demanded artistic freedom from constraints and tastes imposed by the state. He exuded, 'Paris is a true paradise . . . all social groups have established themselves as federations and are masters of their own fate.'⁸

Courbet stood in the Sixth Arrondissement as a candidate for the elections to the Commune the next day but came in sixth, falling one position short. When by-elections took place on 16 April to replace members of the Commune who had not accepted the Commune's mandate, had been elected in more than one *arrondissement*, or had resigned, Courbet was elected, becoming mayor of the *arrondissement* a week later.⁹

Courbet celebrated his new-found artistic freedom as he ate and drank. Louis Barron paid a visit to the 'master of Ornans' in his apartment on rue Serpente in the Sixth Arrondissement. He found the painter seated before a pungent platter of *choux* and *saucisses*, which he consumed with glass after glass of red wine. They went down to boulevard Saint-Germain. The café terraces were full of students and loving couples, while the usual *flâneurs* strolled by, breathing in the sweet smells coming from the flowers of the nearby Jardins du Luxembourg. Yet, in the far distance, the sound of gunfire could be faintly heard. Courbet seemed briefly preoccupied and hoped that the Parisians would not let themselves be taken, noting 'it's true that the French in the provinces are celebrating the carnage inflicted on the French of Paris'.¹⁰

Courbet moved quickly to organise and codify freedom for and promotion of the arts in Paris. The artist announced a proposal of fifteen points on 7 April. His fiery speech insisted that Paris had saved France from

dishonour. He called upon artists, whom Paris had ‘nursed as would a mother’, to help rebuild France’s ‘moral state and rebuild the arts, which are its fortune’. In the amphitheatre of the Medical School, 400 artists elected a committee of forty-seven members drawn from painting, sculpture, architecture, lithography and the industrial arts. Thirty-two were to be replaced after one year. Besides Courbet, who was elected president of the new Artists’ Federation, Jean-François Millet, Corot, Édouard Manet and Eugène Pottier (author of the *International*) were members. The establishment of the Federation and the large number of artists who participated in its assembly reflected the dramatic increase in the number of artists in Paris: 350 in 1789; 2,159 by 1838; and 3,300 in 1863. Parisian artists, like other professions, had feared for their livelihood under Louis Napoleon. In the arts, too, the Commune offered hope.¹¹

The Federation took on the responsibility of the conservation of monuments, museums, galleries and relevant libraries and put forward the idea that the Commune would pay for the training of exceptionally promising young artists. The Federation would soon abolish the Academy of Beaux-Arts, long considered an appendage of ‘official’ taste. A week later, the Federation produced a blueprint for the future administration of the arts in Paris. The Federation’s committee would soon cashier the directors and associate directors of the Louvre and the Musée Luxembourg, believed sympathetic to Versailles. The Federation became increasingly concerned with protecting the artistic treasures of the Louvre from being damaged by Versaillais shells; indeed, some paintings had already been sent to Brest for safety. Courbet ordered that windows in the Louvre be secured, and placed guards around the museum.¹²

The Commune appointed Courbet to the Commission on Education on 21 April, in part because it was nominally responsible for overseeing the Federation. Courbet described his work: ‘To follow the wave that is the Paris Commune, I do not have to reflect, but only to act naturally.’¹³

On 29 April, the Commune named the Protestant pastor Élie Reclus director of the Bibliothèque Nationale, who, as Courbet with the Louvre, sought to ensure that no harm came to its rich collections from Versaillais shelling. When he arrived at the great library on 1 May, he had to summon a locksmith to open the office of the previous director, who had bolted for Versailles. Twelve days later Reclus notified all employees that he would fire anyone who did not sign a paper pledging allegiance to the Commune.¹⁴

While the fine arts seemed poised to flourish under the Commune, the theatres of Paris staggered on as best they could given the severity of the

situation facing Paris. The Commune had abolished monopolies and subsidies to the theatres of Paris, seeking to encourage the creation of cooperative associations instead. The Comédie Française had shut down on the evening of 18 March, the day the people of Montmartre had succeeded in keeping the National Guard cannons from troops, but reopened ten days later with the help of a loan. In the immediate confusion, some other theatres also closed for a time. A reduced troupe of actors (some having left the city) put on fifty-one performances during the Commune, closing for some reason on 3 April (causing a brief panic in the neighbourhood, because it seemed that something dire had occurred), though also performing during Holy Days later that week. However, fewer tickets were sold, the takings barely covering the cost of light and heating. The most relevant production may have been one staged at Gaité in late April. It portrayed in unflattering terms men who managed to avoid serving in the National Guard.¹⁵

With May came faltering morale and fewer theatrical performances. On 1 May, the Comédie Française filled only thirty-eight seats. No one likes to play to a largely empty theatre, and the director adopted the strategy of giving away tickets, so that on some nights there were 500 people in attendance. At least eleven other theatres staged performances during the Commune, including the Folies-Bergères. When Catulle Mendès purchased a ticket to a performance, the theatre was almost empty. The actors went through their lines quickly, accompanying them with slow gestures. They seemed bored, and, in turn, bored those who had bothered to be there. Cafés on nearby boulevards shut down, for lack of a post-theatre crowd.¹⁶

Musicians in Paris played on, thanks to the support of the Commune. The Commune named a commission to oversee the interests of musicians. When the director of the Opera stalled on organising performances, the Commune named a new director of the Conservatoire, composer Daniel Salvador, the son of Spanish refugees. The Commune encouraged music that would be 'heroic in order to exalt the living, funereal to mourn the dead'. Charles Garnier's Opera stood unfinished – it would open in 1875 – and now became a storage facility for food. The old Opera continued with barely half its musicians. On 13 May, Salvador summoned professors at the Conservatoire de Musique to a meeting at Alcazar in rue de faubourg Poissonnière, but only five turned up. One asked Salvador if he understood that he was risking his neck for casting his lot with the Commune, and he replied that he knew very well that he might be killed, but that he had to act according to his principles.¹⁷

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Revolutionary music and symbols could not gloss over great differences in the political inclinations of those men leading the Commune. Former 48ers (that is, those who were active in the 1848 Revolution) were prominent among leaders in the Commune. Such Jacobins tended to be older than the others, including Félix Pyat, Charles Delescluze and Charles Beslay, the most senior at seventy-five years of age. A Breton from Dinan, Beslay had begun a factory producing machines in Paris during the July Monarchy. He supported workers' rights, unlike Thiers, whom he had joined in opposing the Bourbon regime in its last years. Pyat, the son of a lawyer from Vierzon, had studied law, but devoted himself to politics and writing political pamphlets and plays. The pompous Pyat was anything but a man of courage, having hidden on a coal barge during the demonstrations that followed the funeral of Victor Noir. Pyat had a 'rasping laugh' and the 'bilious eyes of a man whose childhood had been unhappy'.¹⁸

Devoted republicans, Jacobins seemed to romanticise a return to previous revolutions – hence their symbols of the colour red and of the Phrygian cap, associated with the *sans-culottes* of the French Revolution. Rigault referred to them disparagingly as 'the old beards of [18]48'. Jacobins tended to assess the situation facing Paris in terms of the politics of previous revolutions, particularly that of 1789 when foreign invasion and civil war threatened revolutionary gains. Both Jacobins and Blanquists continued to respect centralised revolutionary authority. However, unlike the Blanquists – and above all, Raoul Rigault, who had been obsessed with seizing and exercising power – Delescluze and other Jacobins remained committed to retaining essential freedoms despite the threatening military situation. As we have seen, Rigault also made constant reference to the French Revolution and was obsessed with militants of the extreme left during those heady days. Jacobin and Blanquist militants were prominent in the governing body of the Commune and in the Central Committee of the National Guard; indeed, about fifteen members following the elections of 16 April were members of both bodies.¹⁹ Therefore, when the members of the 'Commune' – its elected governing body – began to meet, the political divisions immediately and contentiously surfaced. Unlike the Jacobins, the Blanquists did not want the sessions of the Commune's Council to be publicised, fearing that within an hour or so Thiers and his entourage would know everything that had been discussed, particularly military strategy, which, as professional revolutionaries, the followers of Blanqui considered their speciality. Moreover, Rigault proposed that Blanqui be named honorary president, but Delescluze and

others protested vigorously. He could not stand Rigault's authoritarian posture and denounced the proposition as 'monarchical'.²⁰

In an effort to reconcile political tensions and make clear that the judicial abuses of the Second Empire would be left behind, the Commune asked Eugène Protot, once a delegate to the congress of the International in Geneva and now Communard delegate for justice, to move civil and criminal proceedings along more rapidly, and to undertake measures to guarantee 'the freedom of all citizens'. But Protot's efforts had little effect on the deep divide between Blanquists and Jacobins, in no small part thanks to Rigault's obsession with perceived threats to the revolution. Gustave Lefrançais and some other delegates wanted the abolition of the Prefecture of Police, in order to put an end to what seemed arbitrary arrests undertaken by Rigault. The Blanquist fought against this measure tooth and nail, insisting that Thiers might well have a thousand spies in Paris.

Rigault's fears were not unfounded, however. Conspiracies against the Commune were afoot from the beginning. Within a couple of weeks, anti-Communard organisers began to distribute armbands (*brassards*) – conservative rallying marks that were at first white, the colour of the Bourbons, and later tricolour – in conservative neighbourhoods. Those who had them awaited the day they could come into the open and crush the Commune.²¹ On one occasion the militant Internationalist Jean Allemane, a printer by trade, got through the lines to Versailles in a failed attempt to somehow infiltrate Thiers's government. Upon his return, he related his short trip in the company, by chance, of two loose-tongued Versaillais secret agents. When one of them observed that entering revolutionary Paris was as easy as slicing butter with a knife, Allemane quickly realised his mistake and had them arrested upon their arrival. Thiers and his entourage also tried to bribe well-placed Communards, apparently with some success.²²

In an effort to counteract this threat, Rigault, named Civil Delegate for General Security on 29 March, appointed committed young Blanquist disciples to fill the empty offices of the Prefecture of Police. Rigault's team compiled files, following up reports of their agents, and oversaw policing. One young Blanquist, Théophile Ferré, a twenty-five-year-old Parisian, 'a dark little man, with black, piercing eyes', seemed omnipresent. A detractor referred to the former clerk as strange-looking, 'but what is funnier is when he speaks; he rises up on the points of his feet like an angry rooster and emits sharp sounds, which constitute what one can improperly call his voice'. P.-P. Cattelain, head of security, tried to understand how

political passion could be transformed into such enormous hatred in Ferré, who ‘inspired respect by his honesty and fear by his temperament as a ferocious friend of the revolution’. He could be unforgiving of those he believed stood in the way of political change. Cattelain said that, despite Ferré’s small size, he was afraid of him and believed that he would kill someone himself if he suspected treason. When several men robbed a house on Champs-Élysées, he told Cattelain to have shot ‘these wretches who dishonour the Commune!’ But then he changed his mind and sent them into battle with the National Guard; one was wounded and later died.²³

Gaston Da Costa – ‘Coco’ – served as Rigault’s faithful assistant, *chef du cabinet* of General Security. Da Costa was a tall and pleasant young man twenty years of age with long tousled blond hair who had studied mathematics, earned the *baccalauréat*, and had once considered applying to the elite École Polytechnique – as had his mentor Rigault. He had asked Da Costa, known in the Latin Quarter in the late 1860s as ‘Rigault’s puppy’, to reorganise the Prefecture of Police. He was among those who tried, with limited success, to convince Rigault that the reorganisation should be carried out in a less incendiary way. But Rigault’s fear of the enemy within had taken hold. Every Communard military setback was greeted with shouts of ‘Treason!’ Now ‘a single sign of [Rigault’s] hand [was] sufficient to cause anyone’s arrest, while no one knew what might become of his prisoners’.²⁴

Already unpopular among Jacobins as well as Parisians with ambivalent attitudes towards the Commune or hostility to it for their uncompromising policing efforts, Rigault and his companions’ raucous lifestyle did little to soften their image and provided fodder for propagandists in Versailles. In their free moments they guzzled food, wine and *eau-de-vie*, having contrived to move one of their favourite *brasseries* from the boulevard Saint-Michel into the Prefecture of Police. Nor had Rigault’s appetite for female companionship faded with the coming revolution: he was often in the company of Mademoiselle Martin, a young actress. All this gave rise to rumours in Versailles of ‘orgies’ at the Prefecture of Police. The long workday finished – not without breaks for food, drink and frivolity – Rigault and the others would go out to dine, and drink some more. His critics howled at restaurant bills he had allegedly run up with ‘Coco’ Da Costa. One 75.25-franc breakfast on 10 May allegedly included two great Burgundies and *Chateaubriand aux truffes*; five days later, 62.85 francs bought them Pommard, Veuve Clicquot, Nuits-Saint-Georges and cigars.²⁵

Communard General Gustave Cluseret described Rigault's obsession with the police: 'He could not knock down a bock – and he drank many – without talking about the police.' US citizen Lili Morton was enthusiastic about the Commune, but soured slightly when she met Rigault. She needed a pass to leave Paris, and went to see him carrying a letter of introduction, but the head of the police received her rudely and she was interrogated 'diabolical[ly]'. The American got her passport, but left repulsed by the 'wicked expression . . . [in] his cunning eyes'.²⁶

Rigault, for all his faults, was devoted to the cause and aided communards whenever he could. Cattelain remembered his boss as an 'ardent revolutionary, sometimes brutal, but always subject to sentiments of humanity', emphasising 'the extreme instability of his character'. He could be vicious, but also compassionate. Every day people showed up asking to see him. Women came to beg for help; their families did not have proper lodging and were hungry. Some even turned up asking for help even though their men were fighting on the side of Versailles. The Commune provided spouses of national guardsmen with seventy-five centimes per day, but this was not enough. Rigault provided some of them with rooms in the Lobau barracks. And, having been aided by Renoir when he was on the run from imperial police several years earlier, he also made it possible for the Impressionist to get out of Paris to paint in the countryside.²⁷

Maverick journalist Henri Rochefort was no fan of Rigault. But he admitted that he was 'made of the stuff from which veritable revolutionists are cut out'. He sacrificed all for the cause of revolution. Rigault was fearless – no danger caused 'his face to pale'. Rigault was the kind of man who could tell someone, 'I'm very fond of you, but circumstances unfortunately compel me to have you shot. I am, therefore, going to do so!'²⁸

Rigault set up eighty neighbourhood police offices and had at his disposal a brigade of 200 agents given the task of sniffing out Versaillais spies. In the morning, at least when he was awake, Rigault convoked a sort of council which went over the reports that had come in during the previous twenty-four hours. Political policing remained, predictably, Rigault's central focus. About 3,500 people were arrested during the Commune, among them 270 prostitutes. The prisons of Paris were full. Rigault had ordered the arrest of over 400 people between 18 and 28 March, even though many, including Georges Clemenceau, were quickly released.²⁹

As the weeks passed, the arrests of those accused of working for Versailles increased, and included a member of the International who had been an imperial police spy. Rigault's political opponents within the

Commune objected to his dictatorial methods. Tensions mounted between Rigault and the Central Committee. Rigault responded memorably to a critic, 'We are not dispensing justice, we are making revolution.'³⁰

On 13 April, Rigault drew more fire when he ordered the arrest of Gustave Chaudey, former deputy mayor, follower of the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and a friend and former editor of *Le Siècle*. Chaudey was also a friend of Courbet, who had painted a portrait of him in 1870 and who protested about his arrest. Chaudey had ordered Breton guardsmen to fire from the Hôtel de Ville on demonstrators on 22 January, killing several people, including Rigault's friend Théophile Sapia. Élie Reclus, who described Chaudey as haughty and something of a mediocrity, suggested that the journalist had been incarcerated by the Commune, to which he had rallied, because he had forcefully opposed all 'who do not appear to be acting in good faith'.³¹

Who were the Communards? British journalist Frederic Harrison assessed the Communards in Paris, writing that the "insurgents" . . . are simply the people of Paris, mainly and at first working men, but now largely recruited from the trading and professional classes. The "Commune" has been organised with extraordinary skill, the public services are efficiently carried on, and order has been for the most part preserved.' In Harrison's view, the Commune was 'one of the least cruel . . . [and] perhaps the ablest revolutionary government of modern times'.³²

The average Communard was the average Parisian, young, between twenty-one and forty years of age, the largest number being men between thirty-six and forty years. Three-quarters had been born outside of Paris and were part of the waves of immigration, above all from north-eastern France but also from the north-west, along with seasonal migrants from Creuse in the centre. Some 45 per cent of Communards were married and 6 per cent widowers, although many workers lived in *union libres* (common-law marriages), which the Commune legitimised. Only 2 per cent had received secondary education. At a time of increased literacy, only about 11 per cent were illiterate, although many ordinary Parisians enjoyed only basic reading and writing skills.³³

Most Communards were drawn from the world of Parisian work, including artisans and craftsmen who produced *articles de Paris* and jewellery. Their numbers included skilled and semi-skilled workers, many working with wood, shoes, printing, or small-scale metal production, and construction workers, as well as day-labourers and domestic servants. Shopkeepers, clerks and men in the liberal professions were also well

represented. They were part of 'the people' who had suffered during the siege and felt threatened by monarchist machinations.³⁴ Some 70 per cent of female Communards came from the world of women's work, particularly textiles and clothing trades. Some courageously provided food and drink to Communard fighters or served as doctors' assistants, tending wounded Communard fighters. Louise Michel saw nothing against the incorporation of prostitutes into the corps of women helping the wounded: 'Who has more right than these women, the most pitiful of the old order's victims, to give their lives for the new?' The Commune accorded pensions to widows and children, whether 'legitimate' or not, of men killed fighting for the Commune.³⁵

But however average or ordinary most Communards were, many observers – foreign and local alike – saw the Commune as a pitched conflict between classes. In his relatively short time at the US Legation, for instance, Wickman Hoffman took note of 'the class hatred which exists in France'. For the American, it was 'something we have no idea of, and I trust that we never shall. It is bitter, relentless and cruel; and is, no doubt, a sad legacy of the bloody Revolution of 1789, and of the centuries of oppression which preceded it.'³⁶

Hippolyte Taine, a conservative historian, was sure that the Commune was a proletarian revolution. On 5 April he wrote that, most fundamentally, the 'present insurrection' was socialist: 'The boss and the bourgeois exploit us, therefore we must suppress them. Superiority and special status do not exist. Me, a worker, I have abilities, and if I want, I can become the head of a business, a magistrate, a general. By good fortune, we have rifles, let's use them to establish a Republic in which workers like us become cabinet ministers and presidents.'³⁷

Edmond Goncourt and his brother Jules had assessed shortly before the latter's death a year earlier that 'the gap between wages and the cost of living would kill the Empire'. A workman had indeed reason to ask, "What good does it do me for there to be monuments, operas, café-concerts where I have never set foot because I don't have the money?" And he rejoices that henceforth there will be no more rich people in Paris, so convinced is he that the gathering of rich people into one places raises prices.'³⁸

The economic and political divisions in the Parisian *quartiers* did seem to bear out the Commune's origins in class conflict. The more plebeian neighbourhoods of Paris led the way in support for the Commune. The social geography of Paris reflected a divide between the more prosperous western half of the city and the People's Paris of the eastern districts; and

between the centre and the proletarian periphery. The divide had only been intensified by Baron Georges Haussmann's massive urban projects during the Second Empire, but, with the uprising on 18 March, the periphery had arguably conquered the *beaux quartiers*. This is not to say that there were not some who opposed the Commune in poorer areas such as the Eleventh, Twelfth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Arrondissements, or devoted Communards in the relatively more privileged Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Arrondissements. Social geography, however, counted for much.

The Second Arrondissement embodied the social and political divide that could be found even within a relatively prosperous district. The western parts were more bourgeois, more anti-Communard, and highly suspicious of proletarian Belleville and its national guardsmen and the 'Vengeurs de Flourens' who came down to parade in the conservative *quartiers* below. In the earlier weeks of the Commune, many residents were for conciliation and a negotiated settlement, and voted for moderate representatives in the election of 26 March. The more plebeian eastern neighbourhoods of the Second Arrondissement sent delegates to the Commune, which was not the case for the middle-class residents to the west. Some 12,000 people required living assistance in the *arrondissement* and were more likely to be guardsmen because they depended on the 1.50 francs a day payment for their families. A mechanic put it this way: 'I have seven children and my wife was ill. I had no other means of feeding my family.'³⁹

Given the needs of its plebeian supporters, the organisation of work remained a significant goal for Communard militants. The 'Déclaration du peuple français' of 19 April called for the creation of institutions that would provide credit for ordinary people, facilitating the 'access to property' and the 'freedom of labour'. Ideas and even concrete projects for the 'organisation of work' were in the air, amid confidence that the defence of the National Guard cannons on 18 March had inaugurated a new era, full of possibilities that would make Paris and the world a better place.⁴⁰

Thus the 'social question' – the condition of the poor and reforms that could be put in place to help them – remained important to many ordinary Parisians. The idea that revolution could bring about reforms that would reduce or even eliminate the considerable differences in conditions of life, opportunities and expectations remained entrenched in the collective memory of Parisian workers. Eugène Varlin put it this way: 'We want to overthrow the exploitation of workers by the right of labour [*le droit au travail*] and the association of workers in corporation.' Workers hoped

that newly established cooperatives would reflect the organisation of the Commune itself: decentralised and locally governed. The anarchist Proudhon's influence could be seen in many workers' organisations in many trades. The Proudhonists and the Blanquists imagined that France, like Paris, would evolve into a federation of communes, becoming a free country just as Paris had become a 'free city' (*ville libre*). Such echoes could be heard at the meeting of women in the Church of the Trinité on 12 May when a speaker thundered, 'The day of justice approaches with giant strides . . . the workshops in which you are packed will belong to you; the tools that are put into your hands will be yours; the gain resulting from your efforts, from your troubles, and from the loss of your health will be shared among you. Proletarians, you will be reborn.'⁴¹ This was a time of big dreams.

The regulations established by a workshop set up in the Louvre to repair and convert weapons reflect how some workers envisioned manufacturing operating in the future. Foremen and charge-hands (who supervised lathes) were to be elected, just as the National Guard units elected officers. They also laid out the responsibilities of the administrative council – consisting of the manager, the foreman, the charge-hand and one worker 'elected from each workbench' – which would set salaries and wages, and would ensure that the work day did not exceed ten hours.⁴²

On 16 April, the Commune ordered a survey of workshops abandoned by employers who had fled Paris so that ultimately these could be taken over by workers' cooperatives. A few were indeed turned over to cooperatives. A small cooperative iron foundry started up in Grenelle. Members moved into one workshop four days later and another after two weeks. The cooperative, employing about 250 workers, produced shells that were crucial to the city's defence against Thiers. Workers elected 'managing directors' – not a very socialist term – led by thirty-nine-year-old Pierre Marc, who had inherited a foundry from his father. The cooperative paid rent to the previous owner of the shop. Workers employed in the cooperative earned less than their counterparts employed at the Louvre shell factory. Producers cooperatives were thus organised along traditional class lines and workers were expected to show up with their *livrets* (work identity papers), which they had been required to have with them since 1803, although this obligation had been widely resented.⁴³

In addition to reorganising Paris's workers, the Commune also endeavoured to improve their working conditions. The abolition of night baking by a decree issued on 20 April was one such concrete social measure in the interest of labour taken by the Commune. The debate centred on

advantages for bakers, and the fact that their virtual night slavery was 'for the benefit of the aristocracy of the belly'. Some master bakers resisted, fearing the loss of clients, and the application of the measure was postponed until 3 May, with another decree the next day threatening the seizure of bread produced before 5.00 a.m. and distributing it to the poor. But many Parisians still demanded warm croissants first thing in the morning, making it difficult for the Commune to enforce the measure. Other Commune decrees established a maximum salary for municipal employees (6,000 francs a year), forbade employers from taking assessed fines from workers' wages (which had become an increasing practice during the Second Empire), and established labour exchanges in each *arrondissement*.⁴⁴

Given the circumstances and ideological divisions among Commune leaders, it is not surprising that no full-fledged attempt to transform the economy took place, despite the role of socialists who ultimately wanted workers to have control of the tools of their trades.⁴⁵ Yet most Communards accepted the idea of private property. Moreover, for Blanquists, a complete social revolution would have to wait until political power was secured.

Even though the structure of the economy remained relatively unchanged, the status of women improved by leaps and bounds. Indeed, the solidarity and militancy of Parisian women, who had suffered such hardship during the Prussian siege, leaps out as one of the most remarkable aspects of the Paris Commune. Women, taking pride in their role as '*citoyennes*', pressured the Commune for attention to their rights and demands, and pushed for an energetic defence of the capital. *Citoyenne* Destrée proclaimed in a club: 'The social revolution will not be operative until women are equal to men. Until then, you have only the appearance of revolution.'⁴⁶

Such militants considered the condition of women a reflection of the 'bourgeois authoritarianism' of the defunct empire and the enemies gathering their forces at Versailles. Here, too, the Commune seemed to offer exciting possibilities for change. Élisabeth Dmitrieff, who had helped organise cooperatives in Geneva and then arrived in Paris in late March as a representative of the International, put it this way: 'The work of women was the most exploited of all in the social order of the past . . . its immediate reorganisation is urgent.'⁴⁷

The economic disadvantage faced by ordinary female workers infused women's demands. Many *Communardes* remained more interested in improving their lives than in achieving political equality, a demand that was strikingly absent from the discourse of women. Louise Michel

explained, '[The woman] bends under mortification; in her home her burdens crush her. The man wants to keep her that way, to be sure that she will never encroach upon his function or his titles. Gentlemen, we do not want either your functions or your titles.' Many women were doubly exploited, by their family situation and by employers. One woman denounced bosses as 'the social wound that must be taken care of' because they took advantage of workers, whom they considered 'a machine for work' while they lived it up. Dmitrieff called for the elimination of all competition and for equal salaries for male and female workers, as well as a reduction in the number of work hours. She also demanded the creation of workshops for unemployed women and asked for funds to be used to aid nascent working-class associations.⁴⁸

Dmitrieff was born Elisavieta Koucheleva in the north-western Russian province of Pskov in 1850. She was the illegitimate daughter of an aristocratic and a German nurse twenty years younger. Élisabeth entered into a *mariage blanc* (a marriage of convenience) so she could get out of Russia, after having been active in a student group in Saint-Petersburg. She carried funds from her sizable dowry into exile in Geneva in 1868. Dmitrieff went to London and met Karl Marx and his family. Immediately following the proclamation of the Commune, Marx sent her to Paris and she sent reports on the situation back to him.

Dmitrieff cut quite a figure. She wore a riding costume of black, a felt hat with feathers, and a red silk shawl trimmed in gold. A police description had her about 5 foot 3 inches tall, with chestnut hair and grey-blue eyes. Léo Frankel was probably just one of the Communards who fell in love with her. Dmitrieff combined a precocious feminism with a socialism influenced by Marx and a firm hope and expectation that revolution would someday come to Russia.⁴⁹

As in the case of Dmitrieff, clothes worn by some women during the Commune reflected their determination to effect change. Some garments were colourful, indeed flamboyant, with the colour red omnipresent, for example in sashes. Other women wore men's clothing and carried rifles. Lodoiska Cawaska, a thirty-year-old Polish woman, rode at the head of soldiers, adorned in 'Turkish pants, high-buttoned shoes with a red cockade, and a blue belt from which hung two pistols'.⁵⁰

On 8 April, Dmitrieff sought to rally *citoyennes* in the defence of Paris in the tradition of the women who had marched to Versailles in October 1789. Three days later mothers, wives and sisters, including Dmitrieff and Natalie Le Mel, published an 'Appeal to the Women Citizens of Paris': 'We must prepare to defend and avenge our brothers.'⁵¹

That evening, the Union des Femmes was constituted, led by a council of five women, with Dmitrieff as general secretary. The union called on women to form branches in each *arrondissement*. Saluting the Commune as representing 'the regeneration of society', the organisation asked women to build barricades and to 'fight to the end' for the Commune. It set up committees in most *arrondissements* as recruiting centres for volunteers for nursing and canteen work and barricade construction.⁵²

The Union des Femmes also took the fight for equal rights to Parisian factories. The manufacture of National Guard uniforms, the vast majority of which were produced by women, was one Parisian industry that maintained full steam. The Commune had first signed contracts with traditional manufacturers for the production of uniforms. A report submitted assessed that this meant that female workers were being paid less than under the Government of National Defence. The Union des femmes demanded that all future contracts be awarded to workers' producers' cooperatives and that piece rates be negotiated between the Tailors' Union and delegates from the Commission of Labour and Exchange.⁵³

The Commune gave women in the Union des Femmes, which included at least 1,000 and perhaps as many as 2,000 women, unprecedented public responsibilities, but the response was not all positive. Some Communard leaders and other men reacted with uncertainty and even outright hostility. An official of the Tenth Arrondissement told the female administrator of a welfare hostel that members of the union committee 'were to be kept away from all administrative agencies'.⁵⁴ Yet without question women made essential contributions to the Commune, denouncing the clergy at club gatherings, encouraging the military defence of Paris, and caring for wounded Communard fighters.

While the Commune's main concern was the wellbeing of its citizens, the new government also faced the daunting task of demonstrating its stability and legitimacy to foreigners living in or visiting the city. About 5,000 US citizens who had been living in Paris before the Commune found themselves surrounded by Versaillais troops. US Ambassador Washburne feared that it would be a long time 'before these terrible troubles in Paris are ended'. Counting tourists passing through, the number of US citizens in Paris during the Commune may have reached 13,000. They read the newspaper *American Register*. Most resided on the Right Bank on the Champs-Élysées or in the Sixteenth Arrondissement. Many spoke no

French, but benefited from the strong dollar. They had the reputation of being 'without polish', even boorish, and 'arrogantly aloof'.

Most Americans seem to have sided against the Commune. W. Pembroke Fetridge disparaged it as 'the most criminal (act) the world has ever seen . . . a revolution of blood and violence', led by 'ruthless desperadoes . . . the refuse of France . . . bandits . . . atheists and free-thinkers . . . madmen, drunk with wine and blood'. Yet two Americans residing in Paris could find no fault with the way the city operated. Marie Putnam described the 'apparent orderliness of the Commune'. Frank M. Pixley from California remembered: 'I was present in the city of Paris during the entire period that the Commune held sway . . . And yet during the five weeks – weeks of menace from without and suffering within – I saw and heard of no single act of pillage and murder.'⁵⁵

Indeed the Commune's leaders trumpeted a 'revolutionary morality', knowing that they would be closely scrutinised by their constituents and foreign observers alike. They held themselves to a high standard of honesty and accountability, which was intended to stand in stark contrast to the rampant corruption of Napoleon III's Second Empire. Communard leaders went out of their way to demonstrate that they ran a tight ship and could account for all expenditures. Inspired by the goals of equality and decentralisation, the Commune rejected high salaries for officials, while affirming the principle of having elected functionaries. The idea was that public servants would listen to citizens, who in turn would be actively involved in their government; a poster in the Second Arrondissement called for 'the permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs through the free expression of their ideas and free defence of their interests'. Administrators of the Commune were considered responsible to ordinary people, as their representatives and delegates.⁵⁶

The ability of the Commune to provide public services in the wake of the prolonged Prussian siege and the government's overthrow was also essential to demonstrate its legitimacy. The situation was complicated by the sudden departure of so many officials and employees. Yet the Commune's municipality managed well enough, providing water, light and a postal service. Streets were regularly cleaned and garbage properly disposed of. Taxes were collected. An American woman had received her tax bill, and went to see an official, relating that, in view of the events, her family was having trouble coming up with the money they owed. The Communard replied that this would be no problem, much to the American's relief. She was forced to admit that 'Communards were not as

bad as all that'. The cemetery service continued to function as always – and would have increasingly more to do.⁵⁷

Some observers insisted that crime seemed less of a problem in Paris during the Commune than before or after. On 23 March a poster warned that thieves arrested *en flagrant délit* would be shot. Relatively few thefts seem to have been reported and probably only a couple of murders occurred in a city that, despite the departure of so many people, remained a teeming place. Charles Beslay attributed this to the spontaneous emergence of a 'revolutionary morality'. Yet some evidence suggests that thefts may have actually increased. We just do not know. The Prefecture of Police forbade begging – Rigault admitted on 17 April that it had 'taken on a considerable extension' – and banned gambling, and a decree warned cheats and hucksters to stay away from markets. The Commune outlawed prostitution, making some arrests and pushing the industry into corners, although venereal disease proliferated, as it had during the Prussian siege. A decree in May returned prostitutes to the old draconian regulations, including resented obligatory medical inspections. Despite Rigault's police decree banning the serving of drinks to anyone 'in a state of drunkenness' (ironically, considering the source), alcoholism continued its ravages in the 'City of Light', which could well have been called the City of Drink.⁵⁸

The Commune also wanted to ensure that food was available and affordable. To that end, it established a Commission on Subsistence on 29 March. The annual Ham Fair took place on April 4 to 6; pigs and *charcuterie* went on sale as they had since the medieval era. The price of food rose, but it was nothing like the extreme shortages that had compounded the disastrous effects of the freezing weather during the Prussian siege. Once German military authorities allowed the Commune to open the gates that led to their zone of occupation, more provisions entered the city. Some *mairies* purchased and then sold meat at about cost. Yet Henri Dabot, who lived in the Latin Quarter, complained that his cook could not find what she wanted at the market, and that a modest little rabbit, which before would have gone for 2 francs (almost a day's wage for a worker in ordinary times), now sported the price of 5 francs. Courbet drank a little glass of Gentiane liqueur 'to forget having to eat black bread and horsemeat'. However, for ordinary people who did not have cooks, prices put some commodities increasingly out of range. In early May an employee of the Prefecture of Police reported that Parisians were complaining about the rising cost of food. Denunciations of hoarders became common and officials ordered some stores to be searched.⁵⁹

Arrondissement *mairies* became hubs of activity during the Commune; in addition to selling food at or near cost, they handled matters of local governance that brought in a steady stream of citizens. Paul Martine, a former *normalien* (a student at the prestigious École normale) and *lycée* teacher, related the creative chaos of the *mairie* at Batignolles in the Seventeenth Arrondissement: 'First came our tumultuous deliberations in the large hall where the municipal council met, then the public crowding the door with demands of all kinds. Then came those carrying news, the dissatisfied, foreigners and people who wanted to declare births, deaths, or ask to be married. And this while the cannons rumbled, day and night, all around the ramparts. We were there almost permanently.' Martine often slept on one of the mattresses placed in the corner, as the 'hall of the municipal council was transformed into a dormitory'.

Depending on supplies, the *mairie* of each *arrondissement* provided national guardsmen and indigents with coal, wood and bread. Beginning early in the morning 'an uninterrupted procession of poor women, without work and bread, and whose husbands had been killed in the fighting' arrived asking for vouchers that could be exchanged for food whenever stocks were available. The *mairie* undertook *soupes populaires* (soup kitchens) when sufficient provisions were available. Couples arrived asking to be married: Benoît Malon sometimes performed the brief ceremonies. Malon, who had eight national guardsmen arrested for theft on 25 April, also oversaw burials of Communards killed in fighting outside the ramparts or by Versaillais cannon fire, sad events followed by angry shouts for vengeance and the death of Thiers and the 'bombers of Paris!'⁶⁰

Sutter-Laumann's father had begun working in the *mairie* of the Eighteenth Arrondissement at the beginning of the Prussian siege. His son now found work there. Sutter-Laumann and his father received 1.50 francs per day for National Guard service. This was barely enough to live on, so the salary of 5 francs each per day from their work in the *mairie* helped out. The younger Sutter-Laumann dispensed vouchers for bread and meat to poor residents of the district from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. It was not difficult work but 'odiously monotonous and fatiguing': of 40,000 people inscribed on the registers in that poor district alone, perhaps 10,000 showed up. The help the *mairie* could provide was quite small; many women demanded more, 'half imploring, half threatening'.

Sutter-Laumann made it a point to attend battalion meetings and club gatherings. The clubs incarnated popular sovereignty at work. The club of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs insisted that the Commune respond directly

to all its proposals, even if it took two hours per day. The belief that officials of the Commune should attend such public meetings was widespread. Some clubs admitted participants at no charge, and others had small fees ranging from 5 to 15 centimes and occasionally 25 centimes per person. Those in attendance rose to speak and debate, frequently amid noise and, depending on the subject, heckling. The defence of Paris increasingly became a theme. At a club meeting in Saint-Ambroise in the Eleventh Arrondissement, Citizen Jubelin recalled 'the dreadful threat looming over our intelligent people, the convict settlements of Lambessa and Cayenne that await us if we should fail'. He added that he would die in the defence of his rights. On 9 May in the same club Citizen Roussard rose to denounce 'the young dandies and others who are too cowardly to join the ranks of the National Guard' and demanded their immediate incorporation into the Commune's fighting force. Several days later Citizen Lesueur related that his National Guard battalion had fallen apart because a few men had deserted and then 'everyone' had fled. He accused the men 'who wear the stripes' and who should lead but were 'staying to the rear'.⁶¹

Of 733 people who can be identified as '*clubistes*' (that is, participating in political clubs), 113 were female (15 per cent) and 198 held some position within the Commune (27 per cent). The average member was somewhat older than the average Communard, and most likely to be drawn from the most working-class neighbourhoods. Organisers saw the clubs as a means of popular education and of maintaining vigilance against the Versaillais's 'fifth column' within the walls of Paris.⁶²

On 16 April Sutter-Laumann asked for two days off from his work in the *mairie* so that he could join his battalion, which was being sent to reinforce troops in Asnières. The city lay directly in the line of fire of Versaillais cannons appropriately placed at a château in Bécon across the Seine. Sutter-Laumann was fortunate to return with his life. Near Gennevilliers, the Versaillais advanced, approaching so near that he could easily distinguish the uniforms of gendarmes from those of line troops. The National Guards retreated under enemy fire, leaving dead comrades behind. Those reaching the Seine earlier had destroyed the bridge, fearing the Versaillais would use it to cross the river. Sutter-Laumann swam across the Seine and returned to Paris.⁶³

From the start the Commune faced staunch critics, as well as the nearly impossible challenge of governing a divided city still reeling from months of siege even as it prepared for a Versaillais attack. But while ordinary

citizens like Sutter-Laumann and his father were willing to wait for the new government to work out its kinks – and even take part in its ministries – their patience would be tested by the Versaillais threat. And, for all its efforts, the Commune would quickly lose (if indeed it had ever had) the confidence of many foreign visitors and most of the bourgeoisie remaining in the city.

Englishman Ernest Vizetelly was one foreigner who noticed that the mood in Paris was shifting. It had become sombre, or ‘more dismal’ as Vizetelly put it. Most workshops had shut down, except those turning out uniforms or other items for the National Guard, and ‘there were no spring fashions and no bargain days’. The wine shops, however, seemed always to be open. One evening Goncourt went out to dine. He asked about the *plat du jour*. ‘There isn’t one, nobody’s left in Paris’, a waiter replied, referring to his usual clients. Another large restaurant had no diners and ‘the waiters spoke only in low tones’, while well-heeled clients were dining well in Versailles. On 17 April, Goncourt also caught wind of the bourgeoisie’s disgruntlement. He wondered, ‘Are things going badly for the Commune? I am astonished today to find that the population has come back to life.’ He noted occasional shouts against the Commune, including a man in a grey overcoat ‘who goes on up the boulevard defying the angry rowdies and turning around to shout aloud his disdain for the Communards’. Five days later, he observed, ‘The whole length of the Rue de Rivoli there is a procession of the baggage of the last bourgeois making their way to the Lyon railroad station.’ He went to the zoo, and there thought he had found ‘the sadness of Paris. The animals are silent.’

The Commune’s defeat at the hands of the Versaillais in skirmish after skirmish did little to restore faith in the new order. In central Paris, Goncourt watched as four hearses adorned with red flags went by, one carrying ‘a man, half of whose face and nearly all of whose neck have been carried away by a shell, with the white and blue of one of his eyes running down his cheek. His right hand, still black with powder, is upraised and clenched as if it clasped a gun.’⁶⁴ The bodies of those killed by Versaillais shells were taken to the Hôtel de Ville to await identification by family and friends. Unidentified corpses were photographed in the hope that someone would come looking for a missing person. It was all so grisly. A national guardsman penned a letter to a newspaper reflecting his disgust at returning exhausted from fighting at Issy and Vanves to find the cafés of the boulevard Saint-Michel full of revellers cavorting ‘with *drôlesses* [female jokers]’, carrying on as usual while other Parisians were risking their lives for the Commune.⁶⁵

Within the ramparts of the besieged French capital, many upper-class Parisians, who had been unable to get out or who believed the Commune would collapse more quickly than it had, awaited their liberation. These included the Vignon family, who worried most about their property. They had money, jewellery and other valuables in another apartment in the Tenth Arrondissement, now under the supervision of domestic servants. They also owned a house in the village of Clamart just south of Paris, but all was well there. Henri, Paul Vignon's brother, was safely lodged in Versailles, and from there the former assured his mother in Falaise in Normandy that 'all the honest and sensible people are deserting Paris'. In Versailles, Henri got up late, purchased the Versaillais newspaper *Le Gaulois* so he could catch up on the government's slant on the news – for example, that many foreigners were involved in the Commune – ate lunch, hung around the château, dined again, and went to a café. Henri reassured his mother that he was receiving an indemnity from Versailles of 10 francs a day. In any case, he assured her, the family were still well-off, and money was not a problem.

The Sixth Arrondissement seemed as calm as Falaise. Paul could write to his mother while sitting in a quiet café. Édouard, Paul and Henri's father, was more than sixty years old, so he did not have to worry about being conscripted into the National Guard of Paris. Paul had managed to avoid service in his unit, which for the moment did not have any officers. He noted that there was no problem getting about in Paris, even on streets where barricades had begun to be built.⁶⁶

Ten days into the Commune, Édouard Vignon became alarmed about the situation in Paris, which he described by letter to his wife as the absolute power 'of the most perverse that society can offer'. He did not think that the *honnêtes gens* (men of property) would let themselves be pillaged and massacred. Édouard lamented that all talk of reconstituting a National Guard 'of order' remained only that. For his part, Édouard's son found measures taken by the Commune to be increasingly 'absurd', notably the law on rents and the abolition of conscription and thus of a professional army.

Paul could also imagine reaction by the *honnêtes gens* against these 'bandits'. His reflections reveal the emerging biological discourse differentiating the 'healthy' part of the population and those so corrupted that they had to disappear. Paul distinguished between people who had property and those who did not. The family property was a constant theme in the correspondence of the Vignon family. Édouard received a worrying order from a justice of the peace to take items of value from their apartment in

the Tenth Arrondissement, which had been 'sealed' until lawyers could adjudicate ownership after the recent death of a relative. The residence was near enough to Montmartre that it might suffer 'an indiscreet visit from ill-intentioned men'. Édouard moved the nicest furniture to a room well inside the apartment and took things of value to the apartment in the Sixth Arrondissement, where he believed there was nothing to fear because of the social composition of the *quartier*. He carried family deeds and titles to be locked away. For the Vignon family, the Commune put at risk 'all of society, the future of France, and especially private fortunes', including theirs. Édouard mused about moving his family and fortune to the mountains of Switzerland. He was not the last French person of means to consider such a decision.

For the moment, Paul could not complain. He was pleased to have heard that 'the members of the Council of the Commune have begun to eat each other, a good sign'. Paul reassured his mother on 1 April that, 'We continue to enjoy the most perfect tranquillity. I walk about all day, looking for ways of occupying my time.' Paul went to a café every day to see his friends, read in the garden of Cluny Museum or in the Jardins du Luxembourg, and played whist. He strolled the boulevards alone or with his father. Paul observed clergy walking through his neighbourhood without the slightest problem. His National Guard unit, commanded by 'Citizen cook Lacord', operated under the principle of inertia, stronger than resistance.

In the meantime, the Vignons' two domestics took care of one of their apartments, going to daily Mass, asking God 'to bestow the most precious blessings on our excellent masters and on their dear family'. The servants noted wistfully that 'Monsieur's newspaper' was no longer to be found, only *Le Cri du Peuple* and *Père Duchêne*, of which the Vignons did not approve. Their concierge was under pressure from the Commune to make available empty apartments to Parisians whose homes had been blown apart by Versaillais shells. Each day the domestics told the concierge that they were expecting friends of the Vignon family to arrive at any time. The servants had worries of their own, with a brother-in-law and brother in the Army of Versailles. 'Monsieur is really so good', they wrote, 'to think of our dear soldiers.'⁶⁷

Paul avoided walking on or near streets near his apartment, afraid of seeing men with whom he had served during the siege who might ask why he was not in uniform. One day, Paul went to the Palais de Justice to pick up some papers and ran into a lawyer he vaguely knew. His colleague knew that Paul had served in the National Guard during the Prussian siege, and

encouraged him to join up again. The lawyer could make sure that he would retain his former rank of captain, adding that Paul would see 'that the Commune is an honest and legitimate government'. Paul refused, telling him very coldly that he knew what he had to do, and was not about to join the Commune. Miffed, the lawyer turned around quickly and walked away.⁶⁸ Despite run-ins like this, Paul decided not to try to leave Paris for the time being, thinking that fleeing could well be more dangerous than remaining in the city.⁶⁹

At the very end of March, the railway line to Versailles along the right bank of the Seine had been cut, but the train on the other side of the river continued to operate. Paul's brother Henri had no difficulty getting from Versailles into Paris on 30 March to spend the evening with his father and brother. Likewise, Paul got to Versailles without difficulty to visit his brother. However, many Parisians were not as fortunate as the Vignon family in exchanging news, and even visits, with their families. The Versaillais seized letters sent from Paris via Saint-Denis 'by the thousands'; some got through but many, indeed most, did not. Édouard worried that his and Paul's letters might no longer get out of Paris, as was the case during the Prussian siege. Yet at the same time he rejoiced that increased surveillance by the Versaillais and Germans might prevent Commune propaganda directed at the provinces from getting out. Thiers's government, unsurprisingly, was at the same time bombarding the provinces and indeed other countries with fanciful accounts of what was going on in Paris.⁷⁰

The failure of the Commune's forces to defeat the Versaillais at Courbevoie on 2 April pleased the Vignon family. National guardsmen retreated down avenue de Neuilly and into Paris, followed by Versaillais shells. Henri left his father and brother and headed back to Versailles via Sceaux. Nearing the valley of the Bièvre he heard sounds of combat uncomfortably near. Henri came upon *paysans* who advised against his chosen route, warning that he would soon find himself in the middle of the fighting. Finally reaching Versailles, he watched as Commune prisoners arrived under escort. About 20,000 people waited to have a look at them. The troops and gendarmes were greeted with enthusiastic shouts, while the captured national guardsmen were insulted and even struck. The presence of guards prevented the Versaillais crowd from going so far as to massacre the captured soldiers. The soldiers made clear, however, that they wanted nothing more than to storm Paris and 'take care of these revolutionaries'. Henri wrote to his mother that the Communards had suffered losses of between 1,000 and 1,500 men, and that the Army of

Versailles had only 25 wounded. That the Versaillais troops had decided 'to give no quarter' pleased the Vignons. Captured Communards who had 'deserted' from the regular army had been immediately shot. Henri considered this an 'energetic and good example'.⁷¹

Édouard Vignon's confidence in the French army was renewed after Courbevoie. Once it had reached full strength, Édouard was sure it would show the Parisians a thing or two. The bourgeois was not disappointed that attempts at conciliation or some sort of negotiated settlement had failed. Yet Édouard assured his wife that she should not be afraid for Paul and Henri – they would not be forced to march. Édouard was sure that, when the Versaillais launched an assault on Paris, 'the brave National Guardsmen of order' would rise up and the rout of the 'bandits' would be complete: all that would remain would be 'to re-establish order with severity'. He had heard that the National Guard fighting at Châtillon and Clamart had encountered not gendarmes, but rather regular French troops, who could not be missed because of their red trousers. National Guardsmen had reason to be discouraged.

Henri excitedly related to his mother news of a successful Versaillais attack on the barricades at pont de Neuilly on 6 April, one of which had included an overturned omnibus, another a railway carriage. The Army of Versailles crossed the Seine and occupied the first houses of Neuilly. Communard defenders taken prisoner had been killed; as Henri explained, 'the *mot d'ordre* [watchword] is to take no prisoners, to shoot everyone who falls into their hands'. He assured his mother that 'foreigners' were playing a major part in the Commune, and repeated propaganda reports that the British government had informed the Versailles government that 5,200 pickpockets were on the way across the English Channel to add to the chaos in the capital.⁷²

Henri amused himself by once or twice joining the Versailles troops as they went on expeditions near the walls of Paris. He found such excursions a little dangerous, but 'truly admirable'. He could judge for himself the effectiveness of the artillery duels between the two sides. As the Communards returned fire from Point-du-Jour, he and his friends decided it would be prudent to return to Versailles. But he was convinced that his exile in Versailles would soon end. After all, Thiers had announced that soon his troops would be inside Paris.⁷³

In early April, it remained fairly easy to get in and out of Paris. Céline de Mazade remained in Paris for the first six weeks of the Commune to oversee the operation of her husband's textile manufacturing company,

which had factories in Oise, north of Paris, and a warehouse in the capital. Her husband Alexandre stayed away from the capital to avoid being conscripted into the National Guard. The couple supported Versailles and complained that the Commune was hurting business. Good labour had become difficult to find. Céline de Mazade managed to leave Paris regularly and to ship silk out to the company warehouses, sometimes with the help of bribes. She was not the only one to rely on their method to move in and out of the city.⁷⁴ But as Thiers's propaganda continued to flood into Paris, accompanied by wounded soldiers returning from battle, wealthy and foreign-born Parisians – even those who had held out – began to see the appeal of escape.

The US Legation was jammed with French citizens asking for passports. By late April, Ambassador Elijah Washburne had provided more than 1,500 *laissez-passeurs* (diplomatic passes) to Alsatians, who could now claim to be German subjects. He became increasingly pessimistic about the entire situation, reporting on 20 April, 'Fortune, business, public and private credit, industry, labour, financial enterprise, are all buried in one common grave. It is everywhere devastation, desolation, ruin. The physiognomy of the city becomes more and more sad . . . and Paris, without its brilliantly lighted cafés, is Paris no longer.'⁷⁵

But for those who could not claim foreign citizenship in order to escape the city and avoid service in the National Guard, bribery was the best, if not the only, option. The ongoing fight with Versailles troops meant that the National Guard was in dire need of men to fight, so they did everything in their power to round up those shirking their duty. National guardsmen demanded information from concierges on who lived in the buildings they tended, and they searched apartments, looking for men trying to avoid service. Those men between twenty and forty years of age who were discovered hiding and who resisted were hauled off, and told that they would be put up front during the next skirmish. The Commune cut off their daily wage, in the hope that spouses might pressure them to serve. Yet some men still managed to leave by bribing guards to look the other way. John Leighton noted that one could go to the Gare du Nord and claim to be seventy-eight years old, and a guard might well reply in playful jest, 'Only that? I thought you looked older.' Leighton heard that some residents of Belleville and Montmartre were earning 'a nice little income' helping people get out, even by clambering over the walls.⁷⁶

Wickham Hoffman, secretary of the US Legation, also managed to go back and forth to Versailles, where he had found lodgings, thanks to his embassy. (Versaillais shells hit his Paris apartment building eight times.)

Hoffman travelled to and from his office with passes easily obtained from both sides. But as he had to go through German-held Saint Denis in order to get back into Paris by train, the journey grew from twelve to over thirty miles, taking three hours each way. Friends asked him to travel out of Paris by road, using their horses and carriages so as to bring them to Versailles. Hoffman wryly noted that 'if the Communist officers at the gates were close observers, they must have thought that I was the owner of one of the largest and best-appointed stables in Paris'. His principal complaint during the Commune was that his landlady had run out of his favourite champagne.⁷⁷

Paul Vignon, like 200,000 other upper-class Parisians who had already fled, realised in mid-April that the time had to come to leave Paris. In his apartment building on rue de Seine, the concierge took Paul aside and told him that a junior officer in the National Guard had come by with a list of names in a notebook, asking about people living there who were less than forty years old. When the concierge hesitated, the officer mentioned that he knew he had earlier provided information that he had known to be false, adding that the Commune wanted to make examples of this kind of thing in order to reduce the number of draft-dodgers (*réfractaires*). The concierge took a real chance, saying that there were indeed two brothers normally residing there of the age to serve, *les citoyens Vignon*, who had been in the 84th battalion during the war, but that they had left for the provinces. The National Guard officer departed, saying he would find out whether this was true or not. Paul Vignon profusely thanked the concierge, but knew he could delay no longer.

The challenge now was to get out. Increased Communard security had made it more difficult to leave Paris. The gates were closely guarded and only civilians with passes stamped by the Commune could leave. Paul had heard that some young men had managed to leave hidden beneath laundry in the wagons of washerwomen, or even, somehow, encased in giant slabs of meat, thanks to sympathetic butchers. But guards had heard about that one and were stabbing meat being transported with their bayonets. Several young department store clerks got away by jumping a guard at the customs barrier post and quickly fleeing. A few other hardy souls had thrown down ropes from the top of the ramparts and climbed down at night.

The Vignon family's devoted servant had heard that a young Swiss man had loaned his papers to a Parisian, and that she could get hold of them. Paul and his father accepted the proposition. Soon Paul was in possession

of a Swiss birth certificate in the name of Schmitt, approximately his age, along with a passport stamped at the Swiss embassy.

Early the next morning Paul Vignon, his father and the domestic – who would return to Paris with the papers once they had arrived in Saint Denis – went to the Gare du Nord, armed with Paul's new identity. Guards would not stop Paul's father because of his age, nor the domestic servant, as women could pretty much come and go as they pleased. Paul went up to the window to buy three tickets, indeed second class tickets so they could (for once) 'travel democratically' in order not to attract unusual attention. Communards did not travel first class. They registered their two crates of belongings without any problem, and walked into the waiting room.

The travellers showed their papers to a guard at the door, and he stepped back to let them pass. But a young National Guard lieutenant suddenly appeared and asked politely to see their documents. He announced that Paul's papers were not in order because they had not been stamped at the Prefecture de Police. Paul replied that this was not necessary because they bore the stamp of a representative of Switzerland – 'my country', he lied – and no such requirement had been in place when his brother had left. Indeed this was true, the lieutenant replied, but with so many men trying to leave Paris in order to avoid military service, a new regulation had been decreed. Paul reminded him that, as a 'foreigner', he should be allowed to go, but the young lieutenant would not relent. Paul told his interrogator that he would find the head of surveillance for the railway station, who would presumably take care of the matter.

When he arrived at the police office, Paul discovered that the suspicious National Guard officer had taken a back stairway and was already there. The surveillance officer assured Paul that he did not doubt for a minute that he was Swiss, but that he had received explicit instructions that he could not ignore. There was nothing to be done. If Paul made a scene, they might well have a look at his luggage and see that as a good Parisian bourgeois, his initials 'P.V.' were to be found on his clothes and his cane. He could not go to the Prefecture de Police because for four years he had been attached to the appellate court and often had dealings with officials there. Someone there might recognise him. They would have to find another way out.

By good fortune, they did. As they had been pacing back and forth in the station, a railway employee had brushed past Paul. Looking the man in the face, he had asked Paul if they were being prevented from leaving for Saint-Denis. Paul started to tell his story when the man cut him off:

they were to follow him and give him a small bribe in cash. Bribing the guard on duty with 20 francs – a considerable sum – would risk Paul being arrested for bribery if ensnared. So he took out 2 francs, handed it over, and went quickly through the door to the *quai* while the railway official looked the other way.

Paul, his father and their servant entered the closest second-class train compartment they found. Paul's heart was pounding. Their travelling companions would be six *femmes du peuple*, not the sort Paul and his father had travelled with before. One of the women suddenly warned him to be careful: before the train departed, Communard guards would pass through the cars. She remarked that he seemed too young to be leaving Paris in this situation. Paul recounted the now rather tired story about being Swiss, so Communard authorities could not prevent him from leaving, and so on. 'Believe me!' the worthy woman replied, telling him to slide under the bench of the compartment, and that the others could conceal him with their clothes. This he did, and an instant later a guard looked in. The train pulled out, and twenty minutes later his new acquaintance said that he could come out from under the bench. She had seen a German soldier on the quay of the train station in Saint-Denis.

Now no longer within the jurisdiction of the Commune, Paul, his father and the servant left the train, giving each of these working-class women 'a warm handshake'. The Vignons' domestic servant returned to Paris with the Swiss papers. Paul and his father immediately went to eat a 'copious' lunch upon leaving the station. They then left for Falaise. Not long thereafter, Paul Vignon was in Versailles. It seemed to him that he should show 'some zeal' about working again. He found Versailles full of deputies and senators, but also a bevy of jobseekers, men like him who had abandoned Paris. Still, Paul managed to find a post in Thiers's government.⁷⁸

The Paris Commune brought most Parisians, such as Sutter-Laumann, hardship but also hope. For others with more comfortable existences, like the Vignon family, the Commune was something that had to be endured until the Army of Versailles could put an end to the pretensions of ordinary Parisians. Surrounded militarily, civil war impinged on daily life, as shells fell on western Paris and casualties mounted amid growing, gnawing fear.

Gradually some Parisians who had been willing to give the Commune a chance because they were republicans or favoured the programme for municipal autonomy began to turn against it. Lower middle-class Parisians,

for one, seemed disgusted by the quarrels among Communard leaders. In an attempt to combat dwindling support, Communard propaganda, in the *Journal Officiel* and wall posters, transformed *fédéré* losses into great victories over depleted Versaillais forces taking many casualties. In their telling, battalions and entire regiments of Versailles line troops were abandoning Thiers and joining the Commune.⁷⁹ There was little truth in these reports, and Parisians, even those devoted to the Commune, could not have ignored the mounting casualties from the skirmishes.

Yet growing opposition to arbitrary arrests, hostage-taking and the occasional requisition of supplies did not turn all hesitant public opinion towards Thiers. In fact, Thiers continued to do everything possible to merit the hatred of Parisians. The Versaillais leader had agreed to the devastating armistice, and his cannons were inflicting great damage on Paris – more than that caused by the Prussian siege – and killing innocent Parisians. His commitment to the Republic was at best equivocal. Charles Beslay wrote a letter to Thiers, whom he had once known fairly well, calling on him to resign. The Communard moderate saluted this third revolution of the century in Paris, ‘the greatest and the most just’, and accused Thiers of opposing in obvious bad faith the social transformation that had been occurring over the past half century in Europe. If Versailles now was stronger, Beslay and many others firmly believed, Paris at least had right on its side.⁸⁰

In a grand demonstration of Parisians’ hatred of Thiers, newspapers called for the demolition of the house of the ‘bomber’ who launched destructive shells into Paris while denying doing so. On the morning of 15 April, Communard leaders with national guardsmen turned up at the door of Thiers’s house on the place Saint-Georges. The concierge almost fainted when she saw ‘grim-looking visitors’, but quickly turned over the keys. A quick search revealed objects of art, paintings and books which Thiers had so assiduously collected over the years. They found Italian Renaissance bronzes, porcelain from centuries past, ivory carvings, engraved rock crystals and Chinese and Japanese jade carvings. Courbet proposed that the *objets d’art* belonging to Thiers should be enumerated. When Thiers learned in Versailles that his beloved house was to be demolished, he became quite pale, and fell into an armchair. He then burst into tears. Thiers, one could easily conclude, loved objects, not people.⁸¹

Destroying Thiers’s home did little to assuage the fears of Communards like Élisabeth Dmitrieff, who worried about the fate of the Commune in which she had invested so much effort. Would there be time to establish

unions for female workers as she hoped? Dmitrieff was sick with bronchitis and a fever and there was no one to replace her. She knew time was of the essence. On 24 April she wrote to the General Council of the International: 'I work hard; we are mobilising all the women of Paris. I organise public meetings; we have set up defence committees in all *arrondissements*, right in the town halls, and a Central Committee as well.'⁸² Dmitrieff had worked tirelessly on behalf of the Commune, but would it be enough? Increasingly, it seemed the future of the Commune relied not on Communards like herself, but on powerful forces beyond Paris, and beyond her control. Bringing to earth Thiers's house would have no impact on efforts to defend Paris against the Versaillais hordes. Thiers no longer had his mansion, but he had a powerful army moving ever closer to the ramparts of Paris.

CHAPTER 4

The Commune Versus the Cross

THE SUMMARY EXECUTION OF COMMUNARD COMMANDERS ÉMILE DUVAL and Gustave Flourens on 2 April changed the story of the Paris Commune. From the Commune's point of view, the Versaillais had no right to execute any captured prisoners. It had demanded that its fighters be treated as 'belligerents' and thus cared for, as specified by the Geneva Convention of 1864, passed in response to the bloody Crimean War of 1853–56 and the 1859 war between France and Austria. But Thiers and his government continued to insist that Communards taken prisoner were insurgents, indeed bandits and criminals, and deserved no protection under any kind of international law.

At the meeting of the Commune on 4 April, Raoul Rigault insisted that action be taken in response to the killing of Duval and Flourens. With the support of Édouard Vaillant, he proposed that hostages be taken, suggesting the incarceration of the archbishop of Paris, Georges Darboy, and other ecclesiastics. Four days earlier, Darboy had already received a warning that he would be arrested. When Rigault ordered the archbishop's arrest, he barked 'Get me two cops and go arrest the priest!'¹

Born in 1813 in the small town (2,500 people) of Fayl-Billot in Haute-Marne in eastern France, Georges Darboy was the eldest of four children, whose parents owned a small grocery and haberdashery store. Their neighbours worked the land or produced baskets and other wickerwork sold in or beyond the region. The world of the Darboy family centred on the village church. Early on, the parish priest decided that Georges seemed destined for the priesthood.

Georges started at the Little Seminary in Langres in 1827 with about 200 other boys, sitting in classrooms that were so cold that the ink

sometimes froze in winter. Four years later, Darboy entered the Grand Seminary in Langres, announcing that he would always stand ready to die for his religion, which had been the fate of a good many priests and nuns during the Terror in 1793–94 during the French Revolution. Ordained in 1836, Darboy became professor of philosophy and later theology at the Grand Seminary. He was always fascinated by history and its relationship to theology, and believed that the Church had to adapt to new social and political realities.

Darboy became more and more preoccupied with the growing indifference to the Church among large segments of the population and the staggering difference in religious practice between women and men, with the former more likely to attend Mass. He lamented that people were more concerned about ‘terrestrial things’. Could not the sciences, in which he had become keenly interested, help reawaken faith? And should the Church not trumpet its historical role in France?²

Darboy’s intense study and quest for personal perfection took a physical toll, bringing even suffering, a kind of private *calvaire* (ordeal) that would bring him grace in the mission of saving himself and others. Pale and small, the priest gave the appearance of being reserved, nervous, pensive, even melancholy. His hair, prematurely greying as if coloured by worry, hung limply over his narrow temples. An English contemporary described him: ‘His nose is too big, his lips are too thick, his chin is too heavy, and he is lacking in finesse and grace.’ Yet, as one of his admirers put it, ‘a flower does not require a dazzling casing’.³

In 1845, Denis Affre, the archbishop of Paris, summoned Darboy to the capital, where he was named chaplain of the prestigious Collège Henri IV. Darboy described himself as ‘happy, free and cheerful’ in Paris, with ‘its atmosphere, its chaos, its ideas – its all-consuming life’. Yet as he walked through the city, Darboy was appalled by the poverty of the working poor, the majority of Parisian residents.⁴

On a rainy 22 February 1848, Paris exploded in revolution when a movement for political reform culminated in street demonstrations and troops shot dead several protesters. The July Monarchy collapsed, and, like his Bourbon predecessor Charles X, King Louis-Philippe high-tailed it for England. Darboy immediately threw his support behind the Second French Republic. The young priest believed that the February Revolution could bring better relations between the Church and ordinary people. Then the June Days uprising rocked the capital, as demonstrations by workers turned into full-scale insurrection. As fighting swirled around the Panthéon, Darboy gave the last rites to several dying workers. In the year

that followed, as the revolutionary Left continued to grow in strength, Darboy's enthusiasm for the Republic ended.

Darboy remained concerned about the plight of poor Parisians, however, and hoped to address the anti-clericalism stemming at least in part from the profound disparity in wealth between privileged and plebeian parishes. When the new archbishop of Paris, Marie-Dominique Sibour, assigned Darboy to undertake a survey of the parishes of the diocese of Paris, he discovered the obvious. Parishes in the wealthy western districts enjoyed virtually inexhaustible resources, their religious ceremonies taking place in splendour and pomp. Such ostentation served to accentuate popular anti-clericalism in the poorer neighbourhoods, whose churches were spartan, often almost bare, and priests found fewer and fewer faithful in attendance.⁵

Darboy's primary battle, however, was with the Vatican, and his refusal to submit to Pope Pius IX pushed him closer to Napoleon III. As a young man, Darboy had accepted Gallicanism, a doctrine which held that the authority of the ninety-one French bishops should take precedence over that of the pope.

As one of the major figures in France's most important and visible diocese, Darboy got to know one of the best-connected clergymen, Abbé Gaspard Deguerry, *curé* of the Church of the Madeleine where the marriages and baptisms of the elite took place. Deguerry was a large, imposing, outgoing man who gave the impression that he was holding court, and served as confessor to Empress Eugénie who, like her husband Napoleon III, seems to have had lots to confess.⁶

In 1859, the Emperor named Darboy bishop of Nancy, making him the first openly Gallican bishop appointed during the first seven years of the Second Empire. The Vatican went along with the nomination, having no choice, because the Concordat signed with Napoleon in 1802 gave the French state the right to name bishops. The new bishop insisted that the Church could not exist independently of social and political conditions and that the temporal authority of the pope simply did not correspond 'to modern realities'. In his view, 'the great days of the Papacy as a political institution are no more'.⁷

When the archbishop of Paris died on the last day of 1862, the Emperor selected Darboy to replace him, ignoring the opposition of the Vatican. Learning of his appointment, his mother remarked, 'Archbishop of Paris, that's nice, but archbishops of Paris do not last very long.'⁸ Since Darboy had moved to Paris, three archbishops had died – two violently.

In his new role, Darboy became even closer to the Emperor. Pleased with Darboy's loyalty to the empire, Napoleon III named him to the Senate, the only archbishop or bishop so honoured, and to the Emperor's private advisory council. In 1864, Darboy became Grand Chaplain to the Emperor's residence at the Tuileries, where imperial occupants surrounded themselves with adoring wealthy people. The archbishop married and baptised members of the imperial family and oversaw the first communion of the Prince Imperial. Such flamboyant events made him uncomfortable, because it clearly identified him with fancy folk, among whom the son of provincial shopkeepers never really felt at home. When Napoleon III awarded Darboy the *Légion d'honneur*, the archbishop reassured his parents that he had not been struck by 'the sickness' of seeking imperial honours.⁹

The First Vatican Council began at the Vatican in December 1869, summoned to approve the pope's planned proclamation of papal infallibility, which he assumed would mark the end of Gallican opposition to papal prerogatives. French Ultramontanes were pleased, insisting that the pope was 'Christ on earth'. In Rome Darboy emerged as a leader of opposition to papal infallibility. On 13 July, the pope got his way: the bishops supported papal infallibility but a third of French bishops voted against papal infallibility or did not vote. Darboy left for Paris without voting, later sending in his formal acceptance to a doctrine he had vigorously opposed.¹⁰

Archbishop Darboy's first reaction to the proclamation of the Commune had been scathing: 'This is a parade without dignity and a mindless parody without soul.' In the wake of the first military defeats suffered by Communard forces, on the afternoon of 4 April, about thirty national guardsmen entered the courtyard of the archbishop's palace. A National Guard captain, Révol, carried the official summons signed by Rigault which ordered him to 'arrest Monsieur Darboy, so-called archbishop of Paris'. Révol told Darboy that he did not want harm to come to the archbishop and that this would only be a simple visit to see the Prefect of Police, who would inquire about some shots supposedly fired from the windows of the school of a school operated by the Jesuits – and then he could return to his residence. The archbishop's sister asked to accompany him, but Darboy refused. Ernest Lagarde, a forty-five-year-old vicar, went with him.¹¹

Led through various offices, some of which seemed in total chaos with an overflow of people smoking, shouting and drinking, Darboy was taken to Rigault. The Delegate for Security, renowned for his lack of sartorial

attention, now surprisingly sported a military cap replete with military decorations and sat elegantly in an elevated armchair in front of a large table covered in green cloth. The sight of men in clerical garb seemed to enrage him: 'So, it's you, Citizen Darboy! Well, there! Now it's our turn!' When the archbishop referred to the new head of the police and his colleagues as 'my children', the immediate, sharp response was: 'We are not children – we are the magistrates of the people!' The archbishop asked why he had been arrested. Rigault snapped that for 1,800 years 'You imprison us with your superstitions!' It was time for this to cease: 'Your *chouans* [counter-revolutionary peasant insurgents in western France in 1793–94] massacred our brothers! Well, each one his turn. Now it is we with the force, the authority and the right; and we are going to use them.' He promised that the Communards would not burn the clergy alive, as the Church had done in places during the Inquisition: 'We are more humane. No . . . We will shoot you.' When Darboy evinced a small smile, Rigault told him that in two days he would be shot – and would he be smiling then?

Rigault and his Blanquist friend Théophile Ferré accused the archbishop of having stolen 'the assets of the people'. Darboy replied that the possessions used for religious services belonged to the church councils. Rigault and Ferré were utterly unwilling to acknowledge Darboy's position as archbishop, the properties of the Church, or even the existence of God. When the archbishop was allowed to see another priest briefly, the authorisation referred to 'Prisoner A who says he is a servant of somebody called God'. The archbishop's sister, Justine, was also incarcerated. Darboy was transferred to the prison of the Conciergerie, which during the Revolution had hosted Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, among others, before they were guillotined.¹²

On 5 April, following the Versaillais execution of captured prisoners, the Commune had voted on the 'Law on Hostages', passed by a vote of 5–4, a move that legalised the arrest and incarceration of more clergymen. Article 5 of the law threatened that since the government of Versailles had put itself outside of the laws of war and of humanity, the Commune would retaliate by ordering the execution of three hostages.¹³

Rigault wasted no time. The next day he arrested more ecclesiastics, beginning with the *curé* of Saint-Séverin, along with several Jesuits, at their residence on rue de Sèvres. The following day he seized seven Jesuits from a school in the Fifth Arrondissement, who had unfortunately (in Rigault's eyes) welcomed with open arms the sons of the old nobility and wealthy middle classes. The parish priest of Saint Jacques-du-Haut-Pas

was incarcerated, accused of asking the women of his congregation to try to convince their husbands not to take up arms to defend the Commune. The number of clergy arrested during the Commune may have reached more than 300, a tiny percentage of the more than 125,000 priests, nuns and religious brothers living in Paris at the time.¹⁴

Gaspard Deguerry lived on rue Saint-Honoré, near his Church of the Madeleine, where he served as *curé*. A group of *fédérés* knocked on the door of the presbytery and, at least according to the concierge, came in and helped themselves to wine. Deguerry managed to slip out of his house after putting on civilian clothes and hiding in a nearby house. But he was found and immediately arrested, accused of having resisted the Commune's decree of 2 April separating Church and State. One of the national guardsmen allegedly told him, 'We are soon going to procure for you your paradise.'¹⁵

Within the Commune, the hostage decree accentuated tensions between republican moderates, who still hoped for some sort of compromise with the Versailles government, and Rigault and the hard-core ('*les durs*'). Rigault had already ordered the arrest of a number of moderates who displeased him. Eugène Protot, the son of Burgundian *paysans* and a lawyer who was now the Delegate for Justice, had demanded a full explanation of the reasons for arrests. He was outraged that prisoners were not allowed visitors – even members of the Commune could not see them. Rigault remained adamantly opposed to prisoners receiving visitors, but he was defeated in the end.¹⁶ Over his objections, the Commune voted on 7 April that prisoners could see visitors.

On 8 April a bitter exchange occurred between Rigault and more moderate Communards. Arthur Arnould, a member of the Commune who was for the abolition of the Prefecture of Police, denounced Rigault. He was supported by Charles Delescluze and Jean-Baptiste Clément, who accused Rigault of moving the Commune towards a dictatorship. When the meeting upheld, by a vote of twenty-four to seventeen, the previous day's declaration permitting members of the Commune to see prisoners, Rigault and Ferré tendered their resignations from the Commission for General Security. These were not accepted. However, the Commune voted to replace Rigault as Delegate for Security with Frédéric Cournet, a moderate. Rigault still maintained his status as a member of the governing body of the Commune, head of the police at the Prefecture of Police, and three weeks later was also named public prosecutor. The uncompromising Rigault believed that by dispensing 'revolutionary justice' he would help save the Commune.¹⁷

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The arrest of Darboy, Deguerry and other priests followed the summary executions of Flourens and Duval and were, nominally at least, a reaction to them. But the arrests would never have occurred had the Commune not unleashed a wave of popular anti-clericalism in Paris. As Darboy himself realised soon after he arrived in Paris, anti-clericalism had been building over the past decades in France. Religious practice continued to decline in Paris and other large cities, as well as in a good many regions. Moreover, the Catholic Church remained closely identified with its opposition to the French Revolution and support for a monarchy. The construction of an essentially secular society was an overarching goal for Communards. Reclus, himself a man of the cloth, a Protestant minister, did not mince words, capturing on 8 April the popular mood: 'Plot or no plot, it is certain that the enormous clerical establishment stands as an even more threatening army than that of Versailles, more dangerous in that it operates in the shadows', allegedly working against the Commune.

From the outset, the Commune had done everything in its power to undermine the power of the Church and the clergy. The day after its arrival in power, the government of the Commune had on 29 March proclaimed free and obligatory primary education, but that was not all. A New Education Society and the Friends of Instruction soon sent delegates asking that the Commune consider 'the necessity . . . of preparing youth to govern itself by means of a republican education', and demanding that religious teaching be eliminated from schools. In the Third Arrondissement, a poster bragged that lay education was a '*fait accompli*'. Paul Martine went around with an *arrondissement* delegate to check on schools in the Fourth Arrondissement, but admitted that the idea of tossing out clerical personnel repelled him. In the militant Twentieth Arrondissement, however, a Freemason oversaw 'a muscular program of laicisation'.¹⁸

On 2 April, Palm Sunday, the Commune had formally voted the separation of Church and State, ending government subsidies for religious institutions. It also decreed the confiscation of the property of religious orders (*congrégations*). The battle between Red Flag and Cross was on. On rue de Grenelle, a crowd stormed into a school taught by a congregation and shut it down.

Within several weeks, many members of religious orders had left their teaching posts and asked for the appointment of lay teachers to replace them. The Commune raised the salaries of teachers and their assistants, and awarded equal pay to male and female teachers. Schools for girls run by lay teachers sprang up in several neighbourhoods.¹⁹

A proposal later submitted suggested that new, secular nurseries for infants and young children 'should be scattered throughout the working-class areas, near the large factories', each accommodating up to a hundred babies and young children. Several such nurseries had already been established.²⁰ A professional school of industrial arts started up, with a young woman as director.

By mid-May, the Commune had banned all religious teaching in lay schools. All religious markers were promptly removed, including crucifixes in schoolrooms (some had already been taken away during the Government of National Defence), whose presence clearly identified the once-central role of the Church in French education.²¹ Édouard Moriac watched with horror as, on rue des Martyrs, a 'band' of about 200 'toddlers' marched behind a drum and a small red flag: 'They sing at the top of their lungs "La Marseillaise". This grotesque parade celebrated the opening of a lay school organised by the Commune.'²²

The Commune also took measures to secularise hospitals and prisons. By a decree of 22 April, all religious symbols were to be removed from medical facilities. Moreover, it forbade members of the religious congregations ministering to patients. Four days earlier, religious brothers had been expelled from the now quite busy medical facility at Rond-Point de Longchamps, despite the opposition of wounded guardsmen. Augustinian sisters continued to help out at the Hôtel-Dieu, wearing red belts over their black cassocks, altars and crucifixes covered over by flowers. Chaplains were in principle kicked out of prisons and hospitals, but allowed to return to visit patients and prisoners during the day. They continued to sign official documents, including baptisms. Nuns were removed from charitable institutions in some places, but elsewhere continued their work.²³

For the most part, the Commune was not forcing secularisation upon the people of Paris. The Church's close association with people of means had long drawn popular ire; the birth of the Commune merely unleashed it. Many ordinary Parisians now saw priests as 'a particular type of bourgeois'. If humble priests laboured away in plebeian *quartiers* where churches were increasingly empty, flamboyant processions, ostentatious ecclesiastical accoutrements, and the elegant faithful characterised churches such as Notre-Dame-des-Victoires and Curé Gaspard Deguerry's Church of the Madeleine in western Paris. Letters written to *Père Duchêne* denounced the Church for 'social parasitism'. Irenée Dauthier, living in the Tenth Arrondissement, first asked editors and readers to excuse her writing mistakes and spelling errors and then asked why bishops and abbeys had such enormous revenues. Was this not so they could have

'a more gourmand table than that of the king?' In a city where about a quarter of all couples were unmarried, the Church, which normally charged 2 francs to register a birth, demanded 7.50 francs (about two days' wages for many) to register an 'illegitimate' birth. A Parisian commented bitterly, 'Baptisms, marriages, burials – you have to pay for everything.'²⁴

Anti-clerical discourse abounded in political clubs, which in early April again began to meet in at least twenty-four of the fifty-one churches in Paris. Not only were churches by far the largest places where large numbers of people could meet indoors – as had been the case during the French Revolution – but their use represented the appropriation of public space by the Communards, fully sanctioned by the government of the Commune. Some of the clubs had their origins after the establishment of the Republic on 4 September 1870 and had been banned by General Vinoy on 11 March. Others started up during the Commune. Parisians listened to speakers debating the themes of the day, including the high cost of food, the rights of women and of workers, the state of primary school education, the role of the clergy, and the leadership of the Commune.²⁵

The transformation of churches into clubs sometimes brought confrontations with the faithful. At Club Saint-Ambroise, a woman loudly protested against a meeting being held in the church and militants led her to the door amid laughter. On 6 May, local residents showed up with official orders that Saint-Sulpice was to be used for a club. Expelled, some of the faithful vigorously protested and a brawl erupted. National guardsmen from Belleville, camped nearby, responded to protect '*clubistes*' singing the *Marseillaise*.²⁶

Unsurprisingly, the faithful resented the presence of political clubs in their churches. *Clubistes* were overtly critical of the Church and persistent in their attacks. Club speakers demanded the seizure of property belonging to the congregations, insisted that the clergy pay rent to the Commune for use of ecclesiastical buildings 'to stage their comedies', and ordered that the proceeds go to helping widows and orphans of the Commune. The club of faubourg Saint-Antoine asked that church bells be melted to make cannons, as during the French Revolution.

Female speakers focused their critiques on the Church's outsized influence on women, marriages and family life, including ecclesiastical roles in education. They were particularly strident in their denunciation of marriage. At the great Gothic church of Saint-Eustache near the central market of Les Halles, a woman warned *citoyennes* that marriage 'is the greatest error of ancient humanity. To be married is to be a slave.' In the club of Saint-Ambroise, a woman rose to say that she would never

permit her daughter, who was sixteen, to marry, and that the latter was doing quite well living with a man without the blessing of the Church. The club in Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois approved an enthusiastic resolution in favour of divorce.²⁷

Louise Michel presided over a gathering of women three times a week on grande rue de la Chapelle. There she proposed 'the immediate abolition of organised religion and its replacement by a more severe morality', which for her was 'to treat all others and oneself with justice'. During club meetings some women mounted the pulpits to denounce the clergy with rhetorical violence. At Club Saint-Sulpice, Gabrielle, sixteen years of age, thundered: 'We must shoot the priests . . . Women are harmed by going to confession . . . I therefore urge all women to take hold of all the priests and to burn their ugly mugs off . . . The same for the nuns!'²⁸

In the eyes of most *clubistes*, the clergy and the bourgeoisie were one and the same, which made it easy to condemn both groups. Speakers denounced those with top hats and fancy 'black suits' as bourgeois reactionaries. At one club, a shoemaker demanded the arrest of all 'reactionaries' who employed domestics. At another such gathering, a woman related that near the Bourse a well-heeled lady had insisted that there were no 'citizens' to be found in the neighbourhood, only 'ladies and gentlemen'. People of means, particularly property-owners, became 'vultures'. A millenarian tone crept in, and sometimes a violent one, as at Club of the Deliverance, where a speaker saluted 'the arrival of the day of justice [which] is rapidly coming . . . Proletarians, you will be reborn!'²⁹

Paris's churches, now adopted by political clubs, were utterly unrecognisable, to the delight of most Parisians but much to the chagrin of others. At the club meeting in Saint-Michel in Batignolles, children played while members of the Commune sat adorned in red sashes in places usually reserved for ecclesiastical dignitaries at Mass, who would have been attired quite differently. Instead of hymns the organs played 'La Marseillaise' and 'Ça ira', that revolutionary classic. Citizen Vicar Marguerite was assured on 17 May that the organist would be paid on the condition that he played 'patriotic airs'.³⁰

Early in May, Maxime Vuillaume visited the Club Saint-Séverin, a block from the Seine, with a friend. The entry to the church was almost totally dark, but some light beckoned from the middle of the nave. Gas lamps hung from the pillars. Behind a table sat those presiding over the meeting, with a red flag standing nearby. An orator suggested that brigades armed with instruments capable of shooting fire take care of the

Versaillais who threatened their city. A woman followed him as speaker, but Vuillaume and his friend were looking around and did not catch the gist of what she had to say. There were about a hundred people listening, including about a dozen women. Many of the men wore National Guard uniforms. Two of them sitting alongside a pillar ate bread and sausage and drank some wine. 'Let's go', implored Vuillaume's friend, 'Midnight Mass would be more fun.' As they left, the club session ended with the singing of 'La Marseillaise'. The next morning, someone swept out the church and Mass went on as usual.³¹

Paul Fontoulieu, a hostile visitor, found as many female speakers as male when he attended a session of the club in the Church of the Trinité. The issue for debate was how society could be reformed. Lodoiska Cawaska, known as 'the Polish Amazon', spoke first, her discourse coolly received. Then another female orator of about thirty called for the establishment of producers' cooperatives. One after another, women rose to speak, and their words sometimes strayed from the intended subject. 'Solutions' included shooting those who would not fight. In a brief speech, Nathalie Le Mel insisted that the day of reckoning was approaching, and everyone, women included, should do their duty, fight to the end, and be prepared to die.³² Her speech met with lengthy applause. The final speaker drew cheers by presenting a 'grotesque' (in Fontoulieu's eyes) parody of a Mass. As people filed out of the Church of the Trinité, the female president of the assembly reminded those in attendance that the neighbourhood remained full of monarchists and Versaillais.³³

Entering the church of Saint-Eustache, the Englishman John Leighton was 'agreeably surprised to find the font full of tobacco instead of holy water, and to see the altar in the distance covered with bottles and glasses'. In a lateral chapel, someone had dressed a statue of the Virgin Mary in the uniform of a *vivandière* (a woman supplying national guardsmen with provisions), and placed a little pipe in her mouth. Leighton was 'particularly charmed' by the 'amiable faces of the people I saw collected there . . . It was quite delightful not to see any of those elegant dresses and frivolous manners, which have so long disgraced the better half of the human race.' As for the men, 'It was charming to note the military elegance with which their caps were slightly inclined over one ear: their faces, naturally hideous, were illuminated with the joy of freedom.'

Edmond de Goncourt encountered the smell of garlic when he entered a church, as the bells, which usually announced Mass, intoned for the opening of a club meeting. Goncourt listened as one speaker demanded the institution of the Terror, 'so that heads of traitors may roll immediately

on the square'. Another related that 10,060 bottles of wine had been found in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, and a third asked, 'What do I care whether we are successful against Versailles if we don't find solutions for social problems, if workingmen remain in the same condition as before?'³⁴

In most clubs, however, those in attendance respected the establishment in which they were meeting. For instance, Communards were told not to smoke pipes in the church in Saint-Eustache. Goncourt noted that men took their hats off as they entered. Yet some 'visitors' to churches behaved in provocative ways. At Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Communards imbibed wine from chalices previously reserved for Mass. National guardsmen and prostitutes may have amused themselves in Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. In Saint-Leu on 14 April, thirty or forty *fédérés* put on ecclesiastical robes and mocked the Mass, singing 'filthy songs . . . accompanied by the most grotesque gestures'. A certain Kobosko offered 'communion' to the 'faithful', replacing hosts with brioche, and at the accompanying dinner revellers downed 130 bottles of wine. In another church a man bathed his dog in a holy water vessel and a few Communards relieved themselves in such places. Such acts shocked practising Catholics. The Commune and most Communards defiantly rejected organised religion.³⁵

Occasional pillaging did occur. Twelve convents reported damaged or lost property. In Saint Médard, paintings were ripped, the organ and ornaments broken. Confessionals were overturned. In Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, Communards beheaded what was left of the relics of a saint. However, overall there were surprisingly few such cases, nothing in comparison with what occurred during the radical phase of the French Revolution. Items taken from the Cathedral of Notre-Dame on Good Friday and piled into wagons to be taken away were saved when someone ran to notify members of the Commune at the Hôtel de Ville, who ordered them returned to the sacristy.³⁶

Parisian ecclesiastics saw their role decrease dramatically during the Commune. Baptisms and first communions fell off. Marriages declined in number, in part because so many men were in the National Guard and so many better-off Parisians had fled the city. During the Second Empire, civil burials had not been very common. Now they took place almost every day, complete with red flags. Mass attendance fell off and fewer coins were tossed into the collection basket as it was passed.³⁷

The orders to close their doors affected thirty-four of sixty-seven churches in Paris. Notre-Dame-de-Lorette was transformed into a barracks on 13 May and six days later into a jail for those arrested for avoiding service in the National Guard. Saint-Pierre-de-Montmartre

became a workshop for the manufacture of uniforms, then a storage place for munitions, and, briefly, a school for girls. The Church of Saint-Merri was transformed into a medical facility.

The Communard press kept anti-clerical discourse in full throttle. *Père Duchêne* led the way, accusing the clergy of being parasites with an inordinate passion for 'the good life', borrowing the image of the overfed priest or monk using the sacrament of confession to 'coax' women. The Church stood accused of bringing young girls into convents – 'places full of vice' – where they suffered exploitation as their wages undercut those of working women. Implicit in the anti-clerical tirades were suggestions that the kidnapping of minors, rapes and homosexuality threatened the families of ordinary people. Allusions to secret passageways beneath convents and monasteries abounded, contributing to the obsession during searches of convents with what was to be found in their cellars. *La Sociale* reported that 2,000 rifles and considerable munitions had been found in that of Notre-Dame, and *La Montagne* claimed that monks had been arrested following the discovery of gunpowder in the tabernacles of their churches. None of this was true, but rumours generated headlines and animated street discussions.³⁸

One of the searches led to a shocking story that spread rapidly through Paris. In the basement of the convent of the Dames de Picpus, guardsmen came across what to them looked like instruments of torture and human remains. The sisters explained that they had cared for three of their own suffering from mental problems. The rumoured 'instruments of torture' were in fact nothing more than several 'orthopaedic beds'. A doctor established that the nuns had died of natural causes, and for whatever reason, their remains had been kept in the convent, awaiting a final destination. Yet newspapers continued to offer 'revelations' of clerical misdeeds at Picpus and elsewhere, as suggested by headlines like 'The Confessions of a Breton Seminarist', 'The Revelations of a former *Curé*', 'Tonsured Sadists' and 'The Corpses of the Church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires'.³⁹

The National Guard took reports of hidden stashes of weapons seriously. Laurent Amodru, the fifty-four-year-old *vicaire* of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, had just finished hearing confessions at about 4.00 p.m. on 17 May when he learned that the church had been surrounded by men from the 159th battalion of the National Guard. He asked a young officer what they were doing and the reply was that they had authorisation to search the church and look for weapons. The priest replied that there were certainly none of those to be found and asked that if a search must indeed be done, that it be finished before Mass at 7.00 p.m. The guards glanced

apprehensively at the women in the church. Amodru claimed later that he was lucky not to have been killed by a drunken guardsman who was assigned to watch him in the sacristy during the search; two other guardsmen protected him. Although he survived the search, Amodru was promptly arrested and taken to the Conciergerie, then to Mazas prison near the Gare de Lyon, and finally to La Roquette prison.⁴⁰

Not all Communards were prepared to denounce the Church. Some people loyal to the Commune expressed their opposition to anti-clerical measures, particularly the removal of nuns from medical facilities and searches of some convents of religious orders. On Good Friday, 6 April, National Guardsmen entered the church of Saint-Eustache and demanded that Abbé Simon go with them to the neighbourhood police station. There a young magistrate questioned the priest, assuring him that he knew of his good reputation in his *quartier*. The priest's nephew complained to members of the Commune about the arrest. Upon hearing that their priest had been arrested, the market ladies of Les Halles went to Rigault to insist that Abbé Simon be freed. Slightly taken back by their anger, the former asked 'And if I refuse to release your papist (*calotin*)?' The response reflected the earthy toughness of the market ladies: 'Then we will gut you on the first possible occasion on a block at the market, like the fine top-round that you are!' Rigault ordered the priest released. Abbé Simon returned to his church in triumph and at the next Mass preached a sermon on forgiving one's enemies. In *Le Cri du peuple*, Jules Vallès thundered that when he was arrested during the Second Empire, he did not have a nephew to ask that he be pardoned.⁴¹

Despite rumours of opulence and high living (which, in any case, focused on male ecclesiastics), some 'visitors' were impressed by the poverty of the nuns and their work for the poor, for whom, after all, the Commune had come to power. And when national guardsmen searched the residence of the Fathers of Saint-Esprit, the exchange quickly became cordial, with the guardsmen helping the priests distribute to the poor what meagre resources were available.

On occasion guardsmen sent to search a church ran into a priest they knew in their *quartier*. Communards walking into Saint-Roch may well have been hostile to organised religion, but they recognised the priest because he had given them first communion. Some Communards helped priests escape or tipped off religious institutions that a search was coming. Others provided ecclesiastics with identification papers. And for all their criticisms of the Church, many did not reject their personal faith. Some *fédérés*, for instance, put on religious medallions before going into battle.⁴²

In Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, a priest said Mass every day in a chapel and a club met in the main part of the church most evenings. The clergy thus ended up comfortably sharing space with the *clubistes*, with Masses, baptisms and funerals held at different times from the club meetings, most of which took place at night. The church of Saint-Pierre in Montrouge, where a warning had been posted outside church that 'churches are the lairs of those who have murdered the morals of the masses', was split into two sections, one for the clergy, the other as a meeting place for a club, over which a hairdresser presided. Masses were celebrated in Saint Roch although the Englishman Vizetelly reported that 'they were more than once disturbed by the insurgents, as on one occasion when a band of inebriate Guards rushed into the church while some forty young girls received first Communion'.⁴³

With increased tension stemming from the military situation, popular anti-clericalism became more determined. In the face of such opposition, the clergy remained united, helping each other out when possible and taking the place of imprisoned colleagues. Ecclesiastics kept religious ceremonies low-key. In the church of Saint-Merri, bells were not rung, the organ remained silent, singing disappeared or was muted, and flowers were not put in place. The Carmelites on rue d'Enfer stilled their bells and the nuns of Marie-Réparatrice suspended catechism. The parish of Saint-Pierre du Petit-Montrouge held services clandestinely in a nearby house.⁴⁴

After three days in a holding cell in the Prefecture of Police, Archbishop Darboy was transferred to Mazas prison, along with Abbé Deguerry. They were joined by Louis Bonjean, who had served as president of the imperial Senate and as president of the Court of Appeals, and was identified with the repression of political opponents during the empire. He had been one of the first Rigault ordered arrested.⁴⁵

The Mazas prison was an enormous compound resembling a fortress. It consisted of twelve buildings, each with 100 cells, with a large central pavilion that stood in the middle, capped by a dome, which housed the administrative office and a chapel. The cells were small, each with an iron bed attached to the wall. Strict rules were posted forbidding singing, talking loudly, or trying to communicate with other prisoners.⁴⁶

The immediate goal of the incarceration of such high-profile hostages was to discourage the Versaillais from carrying out further executions of Communard prisoners. Following Darboy's arrest, Rigault sent Gaston Da Costa, his right-hand man, to ask Darboy and Deguerry to send letters to Thiers protesting against such killings. Within days after Darboy and

the others had been taken as hostages, the leadership of the Commune decided to try to arrange an exchange of prisoners with Versailles. Auguste Blanqui, in prison in Morlaix in Brittany, still seemed just the kind of revolutionary leader who could galvanise Paris. For his part, Rigault was obsessed with bringing 'the Old One' back to Paris.⁴⁷

On 8 April, Darboy wrote to Thiers stating that 'humanity and religion' demanded that he ask for the exchange of hostages for Blanqui. The archbishop directly referred to 'barbaric acts . . . the atrocious excesses' of the Versailles troops, including the execution of wounded fighters. He asked Thiers to use his influence to put an end to the civil war. Deguerry had the previous day written to the members of the Versailles government asking them to stop the execution of prisoners, which could only lead to the taking of more hostages and perhaps the retaliatory killings the Commune now threatened.⁴⁸

When Thiers did not respond, Rigault asked Benjamin Flotte, a veteran of the 1848 revolution and friend and disciple of Blanqui, to visit Darboy and propose that he write a second letter. On 10 April, Flotte and Lagarde, Darboy's *grand vicaire* (vicar-general), went to the archbishop, who immediately raised the subject of his sister's arrest. Flotte promised she would be freed (although this did not happen until 28 April). Darboy wrote to Thiers again on 12 April, proposing the release of Blanqui in return for his, Deguerry's and Bonjean's freedom. Rigault refused to let Deguerry leave prison to personally carry the letter to Thiers. It was instead entrusted to Lagarde, who arrived in Versailles on 14 April.

Thiers had no intention of permitting the exchange of Darboy for Blanqui, fearing that this would provide his Communard enemies with a leading figure around whom to rally. Thiers denied that his troops were carrying out executions, adding that all insurgents who turned over their weapons would be spared. He expressed doubt that the archbishop's letters were really his own. When Lagarde returned to see him a third time, Thiers informed him that the Versailles Council unanimously opposed the exchange. He instructed Lagarde by a hand-delivered message to carry a sealed letter to Darboy, presumably with his decision.

Lagarde, however, remained in Versailles. Even though Darboy had instructed him to return to Paris at once, he asked for more time. The *vicaire général* finally sent news from Versailles that a delay was inevitable. Darboy wrote to him on 19 April insisting that he remain in Versailles no more than another day. But Lagarde stayed on. An article in *Le Cri du peuple* on 23 April revealed attempts to negotiate an exchange and criticised Lagarde for having betrayed his promise to Darboy by remaining in

Versailles. *La Sociale* denounced Lagarde as a liar, a coward and a traitor, which did not enhance the image of the clergy to Parisians. The Commune's *Journal officiel* on 27 April published the correspondence.⁴⁹

US Ambassador Elijah B. Washburne had remained in Paris, trying to assist American citizens still in the capital. He now found himself 'plunged into the most terrible events of the century'.⁵⁰ Washburne, whose residence had been hit twice by Versaillais shells, was aware of Archbishop Darboy's plight. On 18 April he had received letters from various ecclesiastical authorities, including the Papal Nuncio Flavio Chigi and Lagarde, asking him to intervene to obtain the archbishop's release. The ambassador had obtained the release of several Sisters of Charity by going to the Prefecture of Police, so he must have believed he would have similar luck with Darboy. When he arrived to ask permission to visit Darboy, Cluseret accompanied him to the Prefecture of Police at 10.30 a.m. and asked to see Rigault. An employee there responded with a smile that Rigault was sleeping, having just returned from a long night out. When Rigault was awakened, he signed a document – without even looking at it – authorising Washburne 'to communicate freely with citizen Darboy, archbishop of Paris'. Cluseret commented, 'So here is the man to whom the proletariat has given one of its most important posts!'⁵¹

On 23 April the American ambassador – the first person from the outside to see him since his arrest – took the archbishop a bottle of Madeira. Darboy expressed no bitterness towards his captors, adding that the Communards 'would be judged to be worse than they really were'. He would await 'the logic of events'. On 22 April, the Commune enacted a decree specifying that juries drawn from among national guardsmen would consider the cases of individual hostages; it also ordered the prosecutor of the Commune – this would be Rigault four days later – to take more.⁵²

Five days later, Darboy sent Lagarde another message, this via Ambassador Washburne: the vicar must return to Paris immediately. Five days later, Washburne wrote to a US official to inform him that he considered the archbishop's life 'in the most imminent danger', relating that a group of national guardsmen had gone to Mazas intending to shoot Darboy before a Communard official intervened. Lagarde may have had real reasons for delaying in Versailles. He may have believed that his return to Paris would lead directly to the execution of Darboy and the other hostages. He may also have been in contact with Félix Pyat, who thought that the payment of a large sum of money might bring the archbishop's freedom. Lagarde may have written to Jules Simon about

these possibilities several days earlier, expressing hope for a return to moderate influence in the Commune. Moreover, General Cluseret seemed in favour of releasing the hostages, which would have given Darboy's supporters hope. On 2 May, Lagarde promised to leave Versailles but two days later was still there. Whatever his reasons for staying, he never communicated them to Washburne or Darboy. Several days of optimism quickly evaporated.⁵³

On 11 May, Archbishop Darboy penned a 'memorandum' to Thiers, which reached him through Chigi. He confessed that he did not know as yet what answer Thiers had given to Lagarde, who had sent 'only vague and incomplete reports'. Darboy described the possible exchange, which would be guaranteed by Ambassador Washburne, adding that 'the resistance of Paris is a military resistance entirely, and the presence of M. Blanqui could add nothing to it'. For his part, the American ambassador assured Thiers that they had nothing to lose with such an exchange, and that Darboy's life probably depended on it.⁵⁴

Lagarde did take some action to aid Darboy. He contacted the lawyer Étienne Plou, who would plead the archbishop's case directly to the Commune. Rigault allowed the lawyer to see the hostages twice. But on 11 May Plou wrote to Ambassador Washburne to complain that Ferré prevented him from seeing Darboy.⁵⁵ Two days later, Flotte, still in Paris and visiting Darboy, was allowed to see Thiers, who again insisted that the exchange was simply not possible; the question of a possible exchange had twice 'agitated' his Council, and he did not believe Darboy's life to really be in danger. He told Flotte that he would raise the subject the next day with the Commission des Quinze, his advisory group.⁵⁶

The next morning, Thiers informed Flotte that no exchange would be possible, because to 'turn over Blanqui to the insurrection would be to provide it with a force equal to an army corps'. Flotte reminded Thiers that there were seventy-four other hostages being held at Mazas, and that if he would sign an order releasing Blanqui, he would bring them all to Versailles the next day. Thiers was probably overstating Blanqui's influence. His return to Paris would not necessarily have provided much leadership to the Communards. Blanqui was a sick, old man, whose influence arguably came from his legend and imprisonment in a distant place. Few Communards besides Rigault and Flotte had ever met him.

Back at Mazas, when Flotte related what had transpired, Deguerry called Thiers 'a man without a heart', believing it to be a calculated manoeuvre on his part. Thiers may well have believed that the execution of Darboy and other hostages would greatly discredit the Commune. The

killing of the archbishop would justify continued reprisals against the Communards.⁵⁷

As days became weeks, bringing no sign that his release was imminent, the archbishop seemed almost indifferent to his earthly fate. Darboy wrote to his brother that he was doing well enough, had all that he needed, and 'was not being treated as badly as they [his family] might have heard'. The prison doctor warned that if the archbishop's situation was not improved, he would not last a fortnight. Darboy was transferred to a larger cell, with a small table, a chair, more air, linen brought from the archbishop's residence, and food from the outside. He was provided with theology books. He had in his cell a cross that Archbishop Affre had given him and a large sapphire ring, the gift of Archbishop Sibour.⁵⁸

Two proposals for escape presented themselves to Darboy. A young man, Count Anatole de Montferrier, managed to reach the archbishop and offered him a convoluted plan involving fake safe-conduct passes. The archbishop quickly declined. Then one of his guards offered to help him escape, but Darboy replied that his flight would be 'the signal for the massacre of the priests', and that he would rather be shot than have others killed in his place.⁵⁹

The summary execution by Versaillais forces of Commune commanders Flourens and Duval raised the stakes for the Paris Commune, as well as for Archbishop Darboy and the other hostages being held in Mazas prison. All the pieces were in place for a dramatic military confrontation as Versaillais line troops edged closer to the ramparts of Paris.

CHAPTER 5

The Battle Turns Against the Communards

THE VERSAILLAIS HAD BEGUN TO BOMBARD PARIS ON 2 APRIL. METHODIST pastor W. Gibson heard a national guardsman say the next day, 'Soon we will be crushed!'¹ The shelling intensified on 12 April. Five days later, Gibson concluded, 'It appears, from what has transpired in the Assembly of Versailles, that there are many among the deputies who would be glad to see Paris bombarded and the city burnt to the ground.' Indeed, by 21 May, Versaillais's shells had indiscriminately killed hundreds and perhaps thousands of Parisians and destroyed hundreds of buildings in neighbourhoods in western and central districts within the reach of army artillery. Ironically many of these *quartiers* were noteworthy for being against the Commune or at least neutral. The Commune was being pushed into a corner by the might of Thiers's army, and it seemed increasingly unlikely they would ever recover.²

British resident John Leighton was outraged that the Versaillais, with whom he had a certain class sympathy, were 'not content with' battering forts and ramparts and killing not only Communard soldiers, but also 'women and children, ordinary passers-by [including] unfortunates who were necessarily obliged to venture into the neighbouring streets, for the purpose of buying bread'. US diplomat Wickham Hoffman agreed: 'It must always be a mystery why the French bombarded so persistently the quarter of the Arc de Triomphe – the West End of Paris – the quarter where nine out of ten of the inhabitants were known friends of the Government'.³

For Parisians who had just lived through the Prussian siege, this was much worse. Prussians had never bombarded medical facilities. The Versaillais did just that. Thiers proclaimed to provincial France that the

Communards were pillaging property in Paris, this as Versaillais cannons were obliterating rows of houses on the Champs-Élysées. Thiers then denied that shells were falling on Paris.⁴

Some Parisians flocked to the Arc de Triomphe on 6 April, to watch what was going on, as they had during the first week or two of the Prussian siege. One enterprising man charged a fee to those who wanted a better view from atop some piled up chairs. From the Arc de Triomphe, Leighton watched 'a motionless, attentive crowd reaching down the whole length of the Avenue of the Grande Armée, as far as the Porte Maillot, from which a great cloud of white smoke springs up every moment followed by a violent explosion . . . suddenly a flood of dust, coming from Porte Maillot, thrusts back the thick of the crowd, and as it flies, widening, and whirling more madly as it comes, everyone is seized with terror, and rushes away screaming and gesticulating.'⁵

The first Communard funeral for victims of the Versaillais bombardment took place on 6 April, immediately after the siege began. Horses hauled giant hearses through the boulevards of Paris. The Jacobin Charles Delescluze, a member of the Commune's governing council, gave a funeral oration for the martyred Parisians, concluding that 'this great city . . . holds the future of humanity in its hands . . . Cry not for our brothers who have fallen heroically, but swear to continue their work!' Less ceremonial funerals would become a daily occurrence. The Commune awarded annual pensions of 600 francs to widows whose men had been killed fighting, and 365 francs for their children.⁶

Among the killed and wounded were boys, including thirteen-year-old Eugène-Léon Vaxivierre, who continued to man a cannon despite being wounded. Another boy, Guillaume, was wounded by a shell while firing an artillery piece with his father. Charles Bondcritter, fifteen, was killed after remaining at his cannon for ten days.⁷

On the avenue des Ternes, now well within range of Versaillais shells, a mournful funeral procession moved slowly along. Two men carried a small coffin, that of a young child. The father, a worker dressed in his blue smock, walked sadly behind, with a small group of mourners. Suddenly a shell, fired from Mont-Valérien, crashed down, destroying the small coffin, and covering the funeral entourage with human remains. Leighton wryly commented, 'Massacring the dead! Truly those cannons are a wonderful, a refined invention!'⁸

Thiers's army was indeed ruthless. On 11 April Versaillais troops pushed Communard forces back at Asnières and moved into the plateau of Châtillon to the south of the capital. This permitted the army to move

cannons closer and bombard the exterior forts and ramparts of Paris. As Communards fled back across what was left of a railway bridge, which had been partially destroyed by Versaillais shells, Ernest Vizetelly watched gendarmes on horses as they 'picked off men who had fallen', some drowning in the Seine.⁹

Alix Payen, whose husband Henri was a sergeant in the National Guard, volunteered as an *ambulancière* (an ambulance aide) because she did not want to be separated from her husband. She was with him at Fort Issy caring for the wounded during the fighting there. One of the Communard fighters found Alix something of a shelter – in a family tomb in a cemetery. The Communards Alix met while tending to the wounded were a mixed bag, representing the range of supporters for the Commune itself. With them at the shelter, for instance, was 'a real Parisian from the faubourgs, cheerful, sarcastic, a little bit of a thug and as chatty as a magpie'. Another was a professor at the Collège de Vanves, 'very well-educated and a poet. He improvised verses inspired by our situation.' The man had suffered a 'brutally unhappy love affair', which had left him so devastated that Communard fighters considered him 'a little crazy'.

The next day, 12 April, the Communard fighters let the Versaillais approach, then fired on them. All was quiet for a time. Henri Payen and the poet, hoping to take advantage of the lull, wanted to organise a concert to cheer up the wounded. Alix took a collection and went nearby to buy some flowers. A mulatto woman, who, like Alix, had accompanied her husband into battle, sang some songs. During the concert, someone shouted, 'A wounded man!' and Alix ran to help an artilleryman hit by a shell while the woman sang on. More and more shells began to rain down on Issy, killing or wounding twenty-six Communards. Their position untenable, the troops retreated to the entrance to Levallois-Perret, their flag riddled by Versaillais bullets. The period of intense Versaillais shelling had begun.

As wounded Communards began to stream into Paris, the city scrambled to find places to house and treat them. Within Paris, each *arrondissement* had a medical facility, such as that at Porte Maillot, swamped with wounded Communards because it was near the fighting beyond the western walls. Civilian hospitals cared for the wounded, as well, although many fighters simply wanted to be carried home. A medical facility occupied a lecture hall at the Sorbonne. Bodies were stacked in the Medical School, which was also empty of students, primarily because most of the students were against the Commune, although some teaching took place elsewhere. British and American organisations also helped care for the

Communard wounded. Near the faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Union Jack and the flag of the Red Cross flew at the English medical facility with its fifty beds. A British Protestant organisation had 600–800 beds in Paris. An American facility also helped out.

The wounded faced the horrors of inadequate care. At Beaujon Hospital, all fifteen men who had had limbs amputated died of pyaemia or gangrene. Hospitals and medical clinics were grossly overcrowded and lacked suitable dressing and sterilisation supplies. Despite all this, British doctor John Murray insisted that the Commune was looking after the population as best it could. Yet Murray feared that poverty and hard times would exacerbate cholera, ‘which is assuredly approaching’.

Dr Murray recalled the sad case of a woman mortally wounded by a shell while caring for the Communard injured at Issy. She passed away after thirty-six hours of suffering. Her friends wanted to arrange a funeral service presided over by a priest, which the Commune hesitated to allow, but then permitted. No priest, however, could be found. A Protestant minister was present and performed the service instead.¹⁰

In one large facility, Dr Danet cared for between 1,500 and 2,000 men. It was difficult to find enough people to help care for the wounded and he complained that in some cases the Commune’s leaders hindered rather than helped doctors. One day, Delescluze, Jules Miot, another Jacobin member of the Commune’s administrative council, and Gustave Courbet came along. Danet had been denounced for having the wounded trade their National Guard uniforms – because they were so filthy – for more simple hospital garb. But some national guardsmen had somehow concluded that this measure was to prevent them from visiting wounded comrades in other facilities. Danet complained that some Communards did not seem to realise that a hospital is not a restaurant, and people came there to eat and drink. He had thrown some out, and they had denounced him. Courbet told Danet that he was too ‘severe’ and raged at him with ‘his booming voice’.¹¹

With the number of casualties increasing daily, the Commune began to rally women to the defence of the city. On 11 April, Parisians awoke to find in their newspapers an ‘Appeal to *citoyennes*’ calling on women to take up arms in defence of the Commune: ‘the decisive hour has arrived’. Elisabeth Dmitrieff and seven other female organisers of the Union des femmes proclaimed that women should be prepared to fight and, if necessary, to die for the cause. A group of women formed their own fighting legion, the Amazons of the Seine. Ernest Vizetelly went to their recruiting office to see these ladies for himself. His account, like others essentially

hostile to the Commune and the role of women in it, emphasised what were considered to be unfeminine physical characteristics – at least as he interpreted them. He described them as ‘mostly muscular women from five-and-twenty to forty years of age, the older ones being unduly stout, and not one of them, in my youthful opinion, at all good-looking’.¹²

Women conducted public demonstrations intended to rally flagging spirits in the struggle against Versailles. A mobilisation of some 800 women took place in early April at place de la Concorde in front of the statue of Strasbourg, a city that had already been incorporated into the German empire. Women in Belleville proposed to march towards the armies of Versailles to see whether soldiers would really fire on them – the answer would prove to be that they would do so eagerly.¹³

During skirmishes in April women battled the Versaillais army outside the ramparts. In several cases, female fighters shot at and sometimes hit and killed troops of the line. Atop the city walls a crowd of onlookers supposedly applauded a woman supplying food to Communard fighters who shot and killed a gendarme chasing her. If rumours and Versaillais reports of entire battalions of women engaged in the fight were not true, the participation of ordinary women in the battles is undeniable.

Women who supported the Commune without taking up arms were equally instrumental. Those who supplied food to Communard fighters or worked as doctors’ assistants contributed enormously to the Commune’s defence. Doctors’ assistants wore red crosses and, often purchasing medical supplies themselves, cared for the wounded and dying. The Union of Women for the Defence of Paris and for Care of the Wounded actively recruited women to serve in both essential capacities. Anti-Communard commentators mocked them; for instance, one cartoon depicted a *cantinière* (a canteen-worker) as a silly, flippant creature dispensing alcohol to drunken Communards. Maxime du Camp described female doctors’ assistants handing out eau-de-vie, and not the ‘simple medication that would have healed’. Some faced the condescension of national guardsmen. Nine such women were forced to return to Paris by males who rejected their presence at the front. Louise Michel commented acidly, ‘If only they would let me take care of the wounded. You would not believe the obstacles, the jokes, the hostility!’¹⁴

Michel cared for the wounded as an *ambulancière*, but had also volunteered her services to sneak into Versailles and assassinate Adolphe Thiers. ‘I thought that killing M. Thiers right in the [National] Assembly would provoke such terror that the reaction against us would be stopped dead,’ she later admitted. Michel was at first quite serious about carrying out her

plot. She left for Versailles, and got through, as she was respectably dressed. But she could not get near Thiers, and returned to Paris.¹⁵

Michel, a decent shot, also fought with the 61st National Guard battalion at Issy and Clamart in early April. Nothing seemed to frighten her. She later related, 'Was it sheer bravery that caused me to be so enchanted with the sight of the battered Issy fort gleaming faintly in the night, or the sight of our lines on night manoeuvres . . . with the red teeth of the machine guns flashing on the horizon . . . It wasn't bravery, I just thought it a beautiful sight. My eyes and my heart responded, as did my ears to the sound of the cannon. Oh, I am a savage, all right. I love the smell of gunpowder, grapeshot flying through the air, but, above all, I'm devoted to the Revolution.' In one calmer moment, she and a friend were reading some Baudelaire together, sipping coffee on a spot where several of their comrades had been killed. They had only just left when a shell crashed to earth, shattering the empty cups. Later a bullet grazed her and she fell, spraining an ankle. For Louise Michel, who always gave the impression of sadness and melancholy, the Commune's struggles 'became poetry'.¹⁶

The Commune sought to rally Paris's women and nurse its wounded fighters back to health, but neither effort would be enough. Daunting problems threatened to undermine the defence of Paris, and instability in the Commune and the National Guard did little to help matters. No well-planned, sturdy network of defence had been constructed within the ramparts of besieged Paris. The confusion of competing authorities in Paris and the chaos engendered by the election and re-election of National Guard officers worked against the Commune. Some of the officers were happy to flash glittering symbols of their status, but did little more. Unreliability and lack of training within the officer corps, as well as difficulty getting often hard-drinking Communard guardsmen to accept military-type discipline, were constant problems. Jealousies and rivalries between officers contributed to the confusion. Insubordination remained chronic and the distribution of weapons and munitions erratic. Perfectly capturing the growing lack of confidence in National Guard commanders, a cartoon in a Communard newspaper depicted a hungry man in a restaurant exclaiming, 'Waiter, two or three more stuffed generals!' 'We are out of them', the waiter replies. 'Very well, then a dozen colonels in caper sauce.' 'A Dozen? Yes! Directly!'¹⁷

Furthermore, not all guardsmen were absolutely committed to the Commune and some fulfilled a minimum of their duties, their loyalty more to their comrades in their company or battalion. Émile Maury was

one of these. Born in Colmar, he now lived in the *quartier populaire* of Popincourt. He had joined the National Guard during the Franco-Prussian War, which he viewed as a patriotic struggle because of his Alsatian origins. Maury had turned up when the roll of the drums summoned him on the night of 12 April, after a demonstration by 'the friends of order'. In late April, when called to service again, he instead visited his mother in her small shop. In his view only 'the very needy, the rabid, and the curious' in his unit actually marched out of Paris to fight – and he was none of these. From the environs of the Church of the Madeleine he could hear the explosion of shells falling near the Arc de Triomphe. On another occasion, he did venture out to Porte Maillot with part of his unit. When a Versaillais shell fell near him, he took refuge under a carriage door on the right side of the avenue and then at the Gare de la Porte Maillot. After his 'baptism of fire', he took an omnibus back to Paris, and then went to assure his parents that he was fine, cynically describing 'this brilliant expedition'. At the end of April, he feared that everything would finish badly for the Communards, referring to them in the third person as though he no longer counted himself as one. Such indifference, however widespread, compromised the defence of Paris.¹⁸

Attempts to achieve some sort of negotiated settlement briefly revived but utterly failed. The Freemasons sent a delegation to Versailles on 21 April. Thiers sent them away, telling them: 'A few buildings will be damaged, a few people killed, but the law will prevail.' On 29 April, a demonstration of 10,000 people, many wearing masonic symbols, moved from the place du Carrousel near the Louvre to the Hôtel de Ville. Masons planted their flag on the ramparts. On 8 May, a poster appeared on the walls of Paris calling for conciliation and criticising the intransigence of the Commune's leaders. This drew a violent response from the Union des Femmes.¹⁹

Adolphe Thiers remained convinced that superior cannons would suffice to achieve victory. Versaillais shelling of Paris became increasingly incessant. Fifty-two guns opened fire from Châtillon, Breteuil and the heights of Bagneux on 25 April. Thiers's insistence that a private contractor mount eighty enormous naval guns at Montretout to increase firepower probably delayed the Versaillais assault on Paris, annoying his generals. At one point, Marshal Patrice de MacMahon had had enough of Thiers's insistence that he knew it all and told him that it would be impossible to continue in his post because of the latter's constant interference. Thiers backed down.²⁰

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Confronted by an increasingly precarious military situation and the Versaillais threat to Fort Issy, the aged Jacobin Jules Miot had suggested on 28 April the creation of a Committee of Public Safety. This was a self-conscious throwback to 1793, when the Republic was under assault from counter-revolutionary forces within France and from the armies of the crowned allies of the Bourbons. The Paris of 1871 bore some striking similarities to the city of the revolutionary era. Jacobins, including Charles Delescluze, Félix Pyat and others who constantly referred to the French Revolution, generally favoured the proposal. And so did Blanquists, including Rigault – it sat nicely alongside Blanquist ideology and his own obsession with the French Revolution. A ‘minority’, which included Lefrançais, Gustave Courbet, Éugène Varlin and Benoît Malon, opposed the constitution of the Committee of Public Safety.

On 1 May, the Commune approved the proposal by a vote of 34 to 28. The minority called such a step dictatorial, while the majority insisted that, as in 1793–94, the war necessitated such a move. For his part, Courbet concluded that the Committee of Public Safety represented a ‘return, dangerous or useless, violent or inoffensive, to a past that should teach us, but without us having to copy it’. *Le Prolétaire* echoed the ‘minority’: ‘You are servants of the people: do not pretend to be sovereigns, for the role befits you no more than it did the despots who came before you.’²¹

Members of the Committee of Public Safety included the Blanquists Armand Arnaud, Léon Meilliet and Gabriel Ranvier – by far the most able – as well as Charles Gérardin and Félix Pyat. The Committee immediately began to butt heads with the Central Committee of the National Guard, the continued existence of which compromised attempts by the Delegates for War to centralise its authority over the National Guard itself. On 1 May, General Gustave Cluseret, who became a scapegoat for the Commune’s inability to transform the National Guard into an organised fighting force, was falsely accused of treason and arrested at the behest of the Committee of Public Safety, and incarcerated in the Conciergerie, the Gothic prison on the Ile-de-la-Cité. Three days later, the Central Committee challenged the Committee of Public Safety, demanding that it replace the War Delegation with new members. In the Commune’s view it was clear that the Central Committee sought to take over the defence of Paris.²²

In response, the Commune chose Louis-Nathaniel Rossel to replace the imprisoned Cluseret. Born in the Breton town of Saint-Brieuc in 1844 into a military family of republican Protestants from the Cévennes, Rossel

had graduated from the elite École Polytechnique. A critic described him as speaking 'too rapidly, the words gushing from his mouth in a most disorderly manner'. Rossel had served as chief of Cluseret's staff, but claimed that his boss was jealous of him. He noted cynically that 'men are soon worn out in revolutionary periods' and that this was Cluseret's case. The Central Committee feared its influence would be eclipsed by Rossel, who had been all for the idea of the Committee of Public Safety, in part as a way of getting rid of Cluseret. On 30 April the Commune named Rossel Delegate for War.

The Central Committee might have been wary of Rossel, but it was inaction and infighting among the Commune's leadership that stymied his plans for the defence of Paris. The Executive Commission summoned Rossel, demanding to know his overall strategy. Rossel was instinctively suspicious that the 'amateurs' of the Commune would obstruct serious reform. Hoping to work around them, he had met secretly with Maxime Vuillaume and the Communard General Jaroslaw Dombrowski, a member of the minor Polish nobility, to discuss the possibility of creating a dictatorship in the interests of defending the Commune against Versailles. Rigault apparently agreed with the idea of a coup d'état, but, single-minded as ever, wanted to wait for the exchange of his hero Blanqui. In the meantime, Rossel had to deal with the five-man War Delegation, only three of whom did any work. As for the Central Committee, he observed with frustration, it 'was incapable of managing anything'. Yet Rossel went along with the Delegation's plan to administer the Commune's military structure, while he oversaw the actual defence of Paris. Commanders of the National Guard promised that twenty-five battalions of 500 men each would be ready to fight. Versaillais attacks on the night of 3 May had already moved them closer to the ramparts of Paris and they took many Communard prisoners.²³

Rossel's first move as the new Delegate for War was to order the construction of more barricades, particularly to protect major strategic points within Paris. He named Napoléon Gaillard, a shoemaker sometimes credited for inventing rubber overshoes and a member of the International, to oversee the construction of these barricades, including the one protecting the key artery parallel to the Seine, rue Rivoli, at the corner of Saint-Denis. Rossel described the average barricade as being 'a wall of cobblestones between 4½ and 5 feet high and 3 to 4½ feet thick'. At place de la Concorde, Gaillard's enormous 'château' – constructed at the cost of about 80,000 francs – connected rue Saint-Florentin to the Tuileries gardens. Built of sandbags and barrels, with a ditch about sixteen

feet deep dug in front of it, it stretched across the enormous *place*. One small passageway cut through it was 'so narrow that only one person could pass at a time'. Gaillard later proudly posed in front of it, wearing a splendid uniform with gold decorations and shiny boots.

Yet several newspapers, including *Le Cri du peuple*, complained about the lack of speed with which such defences were built. An American family living on avenue Friedland, which had only a hastily constructed and relatively flimsy barricade, even hired a taxi to behold Gaillard's masterpiece.²⁴ No such giant barricade had before graced the squares and streets of Paris. Fearful of what now seemed an inevitable battle of frightening proportions, people living nearby began to leave their apartments.

While the new barricades were being built, Rossel ordered Polish General Wroblewski to organise the defence of the remaining exterior forts and the defence of the ramparts. For example, Wroblewski appointed commanders to be responsible for specific sectors in Paris, naming Napoléon La Cécilia to the area between the Seine and the left bank of the small Bièvre River. The hope was that barricades could slow down a Versaillais advance, possibly demoralising the invading troops. However, the Commune lacked a coordinated structure of defences to defend central Paris against the certainty of an invasion by the reconstituted powerful army of Versailles. Imposing defensive impediments were particularly absent in western Paris.²⁵

Versaillais forces continued to gain ground beyond the ramparts of Paris, inflicting huge casualties on Communard fighters and, in defiance of the Geneva Convention of 1864, killing Communard prisoners and women alike. Capturing a château and the railway station at Clamart on 2 May, they executed former soldiers as deserters. This allowed the Army of Versailles to set up another huge battery, which rained shells on Fort Vanves. Nearby the soldiers of 'order' shot two young women aiding doctors, including seventeen-year-old Armande Lafort, gunned down despite the pleas of the wounded men in her care. A week later, Versaillais forces stormed a defended windmill in Cachan and then took two barricades in Bourg-la-Reine, south of Paris, killing a hundred defenders and taking fifty prisoners. The next day, the shelling of Porte Dauphine, Porte Maillot and Point-du-Jour took on a new intensity.²⁶

Versaillais forces made further advances toward the western ramparts of Paris on the night of 3 May, taking some prisoners. In the wake of a Versaillais victory at Moulin Saquet, between Fort Montrouge and Fort Ivry to the south of Paris on 3 and 4 May, the victorious soldiers mutilated

some of the 300 or more Communards killed in the fighting. Already weakened by weeks of conventional shelling, and after putting up stiff resistance in and around the village of Issy, the *fédérés* abandoned Fort Issy on 8 May after two weeks of fighting, with up to ten Versaillais shells thundering down each minute of the previous day, and the loss of about 500 men killed or wounded.²⁷

In Paris news of the fall of Fort Issy led to what US Ambassador Elijah B. Washburne called 'a day of panic', despite the Commune's official denials. The next day Versaillais cannons pounded the gates of Auteuil and Passy, and an eventual entry seemed possible through Point-du-Jour on the western edge of the capital, where the Seine met the ramparts of Paris. The great battery at Montretout opened fire on 8 May. Three days later Thiers promised the *honnêtes gens* (men of property) that his troops would enter Paris within eight days. Communard forces abandoned Fort Vanves on 13 May. A successful defence would have required 8,000 men; the Commune could muster but 2,000, if that. Firing from forts Issy and Vanves, Versaillais cannons could now inflict even greater damage on the capital, forcing more defenders from the ramparts. The Army of Versailles now held the entire Bois-de-Boulogne. Within a week Thiers's army was ensconced on the other side of the fortifications.²⁸

Rossel planned an attack to retake Fort d'Issy, lost by his predecessor. Upon his arrival at place de la Concorde on 9 May, he expected to find about 12,000 national guardsmen ready to march. He found only a few battalions, no more than 7,000 guardsmen. Diminishing numbers of available, committed national guardsmen, as well as the lack of discipline and centralised authority, compounded the enormous material disadvantages confronting the defence of Paris.²⁹

Immediately after the place de la Concorde fiasco, Rossel, who had angered Communard leaders by releasing the news of the fall of Fort Issy, resigned. The Commune convened in a secret session to try to resolve tensions between the minority and the majority. Old quarrels and hatreds came pouring forth. Although the Military Delegation of the Commune continued to support Rossel, the majority on the Committee of Public Safety denounced the Delegate for War. Pyat accused him of dictatorial methods, demanding his arrest on the charge of treason. Under guard, Rossel requested a cell in Mazas prison, and then, with the help of his friend Gérardin, managed to get out of the Hôtel de Ville and hide in Paris until 8 June. The members of the Commune elected new Committee of Public Safety members drawn from the majority, including Eudes, Ranvier and Delescluze. Pyat was not re-elected. The reconstituted

Committee then decided that the next Delegate for War would be a civilian: Delescluze, who had seemed on the verge of joining the minority. He had absolutely no military background, and found Rossel to secretly sound him out on the military situation.³⁰

Even from hiding, Rossel continued to try to run Paris's defence. He sent Napoléon Gaillard suggestions for how the defence should be organised. He warned that the Versaillais would attack the ramparts via le Pont-du-Jour and Fort Issy, and reminded Gaillard that the only 'seriously revolutionary forces' were those of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Arrondissements. Rossel had confidence in the determination of the remaining national guardsmen, insisting that ordinary people of Paris fought not only for their 30 *sous* but 'for a settlement of the social question'. However, he believed that if National Guard units fell back to defend their own neighbourhoods, the overall defence of what was left of Communard Paris would be compromised. He recommended the repositioning of National Guard units that were particularly reliable: those of the Eighteenth Arrondissement to go permanently to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Arrondissements to reinforce the defence of Grenelle, Vaugirard and Montrouge; those of the Nineteenth to La Muette near the western ramparts; and those of the Twentieth, widely considered the most reliable, to the Pont-du-Jour. His informed advice fell on deaf ears.³¹

On 15 May the minority published a scathing protest, attacking the majority for leading the Commune towards dictatorship and away from meaningful social and political reform. The members of the minority announced that because of their devotion to 'our great communal cause, for which so many citizens were dying', they would withdraw to 'our *arrondissements*, perhaps too neglected', adding that 'the principles of serious and social reform' seemed to have been forgotten. The minority issued a statement calling for members of the minority to return to their neighbourhoods and attend to important tasks there. The majority reacted by announcing the suspension of four members of the Commune, including Varlin. In a flurry of verbal violence, *Père Duchêne* denounced the twenty-two members of the minority as 'deserters in the face of the enemy who merit nothing more than an execution squad!'³² These acrimonious disputes compromised the defence of Paris, eroding the trust of the people of the besieged capital.

Karl Marx's daughter Jenny was in Paris during the Commune. She, like Rossel, understood just how precarious the situation had become. On 12 May, she related to her father that the end of the Paris Commune loomed because of the lack of military planning (accentuated by an inveterate resistance towards 'everything that is military') and open dissension

among leaders. She wrote chillingly, 'We are on the verge of a second June massacre.'³³

Thiers's flat refusal to agree to an exchange generated outrage in Paris and calls for the archbishop's execution. *La Montagne* insisted that 'not one voice would be heard to damn us on the day when we shoot Archbishop Darboy . . . and if they do not return Blanqui to us, [Darboy] will indeed die'. Addressing a club, Louise Michel demanded the execution of a high-profile hostage every twenty-four hours until *citoyen Blanqui* arrived in Paris. On 15 May, Citizen Widow Thyou got up in the club of Saint-Ambroise and demanded that within twenty-four hours all people having anything at all to do with the Church be shot, from the parish priests down to those filling vessels with holy water.³⁴

While the Commune's leaders quarrelled and Versaillais troops neared the city, the Parisian elites waited, hoping that the Commune would come to an end with no trouble to themselves. Others took a more active role and joined in the fight against the Communards. Gustave des E. was very much in the former camp. As May arrived, his peaceful existence in Paris continued, even as Versaillais troops drew nearer to the fortifications. A well-off forty-eight-year-old bachelor trained in law but who had never worked, he was just the kind of person who would hate the Commune. A carriage was always available to take him to the Cercle des Arts at the corner of boulevard des Italiens and rue de Choiseuil. His club offered very comfortable salons for conversation, and some members referred to it jokingly as the 'Circle of Grocers', playfully differentiating bourgeois members from artists, if there were any to be found there. Most members were magistrates and lawyers, 'all friends of calm and good manners'.³⁵ Gustave lived on rue Auber near Garnier's uncompleted Opera, with a servant and a very good cook to take care of his daily needs. Food was never in short supply. On 4 May, he bragged that for lunch he had dined on a beautiful fillet of sole, boiled mutton with vinaigrette, asparagus (very much in season for those who could afford it), and dessert. Paris may have been suffering under siege, but he found it *drôle* that he could still eat so very well. The evening before, he had put away 'the most succulent duckling and [later] today a delicious roast with a famous ham with spinach'. His cook took care of the shopping, purchasing enough provisions to last for three or four days, including an entire leg of venison. Fine vegetables and butter were still available – at least to Gustave.

One day his brother's valet refused to carry mail to Saint-Denis, on his last trip there having been warned by a Prussian soldier that he would

arrest him. In Gustave's *quartier*, things began to go downhill that month. He resented the instruction that, from 14 May, all Parisians were supposed to carry an identity card. Moreover, nearby churches had been transformed into political clubs and there were only lay teachers in the local schools. More people in the neighbourhood had gone off to Versailles or elsewhere.

Gustave was convinced that Karl Marx's International controlled the fate of Paris. Communards, in his eyes, were 'adventurers, the ambitious, and the down-and-out'. On a Saturday, national guardsmen came through the neighbourhood searching for men dodging conscription into the National Guard. Gustave felt a little humiliated that they did not ask for his papers, because he did not look younger than forty, the maximum age (in principle) for obligatory service. Like a few of his neighbours, he hung an American flag from one of his windows in the hope of confusing Communard officials.

By mid-May, once the Versaillais had advanced close to the ramparts, Gustave was forced to deal with the fact that his life might be at risk. Increased Communard security now made it more difficult for Gustave to get out of Paris. Moreover, it seemed inadvisable to stray too far away from one's *quartier*, especially the prosperous one in which he resided, and especially to avoid the peripheral districts such as Montmartre. Ordinary people saw Versaillais spies everywhere, and if someone like Gustave should be stopped, 'a bad quarter of an hour could follow'. He then returned to his favourite theme, what he had eaten: 'Yesterday, it was a first-rate mackerel, a fillet of venison with small white onions with cream'. Cannon fire in the distance provided seasoning. His little cat slept through it all. If fighting came to central Paris, he would simply remain inside his apartment. Besides, he had enough to eat for several days, at least. He had just polished off 'an exquisite fillet purchased for 55 *sous*'.

While elite Parisians like Gustave relaxed, others left Paris to take up arms against the Commune. When the Commune began on 18 March, Albert Hans had been working in an infirmary in Paris. He was a veteran of military campaigns in the Crimean War, South-East Asia and Mexico. To his satisfaction, in his infirmary they separated those still suffering wounds from the Prussian siege and *fédérés*. To his annoyance, an 'insurgent' who had been wounded at Asnières benefited because, as he had been an artillery officer, he was put with the regular army officers. Hans mocked the wounded man's lack of education and the fact that – at least in his view – he had been a 'bad worker' before becoming a club orator.³⁶

Hans managed to leave Paris and join the Volunteers of the Seine, part of the Versaillais 'National Guard of Order' being organised in Chartres under the command of Gustave Durieu, who had fought as an officer against Mexican patriots, and who had joined the Confederate forces as a lieutenant in the US Civil War. The Volunteers of the Seine would expand to 6,000 men.³⁷

On 20 April, the Volunteers of the Seine were attached to the First Corps of the Versailles Army. At first Hans was upset that only about 120 men of some 1,500 original Volunteers had shown up. The army had performed well during the Prussian siege, but Hans was convinced that the 'appalling disease of indiscipline' that had characterised the French army following the humiliation of defeat had surfaced in the regiment. But, well into the second month of the Paris Commune, morale and efficiency had returned with the enlistment of former soldiers from Lorraine who had been released by the Prussians.

Hans was ready to make war on the Communards. If the Volunteers of the Seine included a good many Parisians, most were not drawn from the ranks of ordinary residents. Hans sang the praises of the son of a banker, who proved to be 'one of the most determined and most devoted' of the volunteers. Increasingly, one of the tropes of 'the war on Paris' and its insurgent plebeians was that of battle against an inferior people. The notion, so present in the emerging colonial discourse, was now applied to Communards. In Hans's assessment, all the Volunteers of the Seine belonged to 'the great family of conservatism', sharing a determination to crush the Paris Commune.

On the night of 12–13 May, the Volunteers of the Seine moved into position in the Bois-de-Boulogne, amid rumours in the ranks that the time to enter Paris was approaching. Hans's Volunteers were sent to Asnières. Near pont de Clichy, the Volunteers of the Seine dug in across the river from 'insurgent' positions. After a night-time reconnaissance excursion on 14 May, *fédéré* shells landed near them from Commune cannons at a wide bend of the Seine. Hans concluded that envious hatred against those 'who own property' drove the Communards to take reprisals against those few remaining residents of the western suburbs.³⁸ The Volunteers of the Seine were, along with the regular line troops, ready to take their revenge.

In Versailles, meanwhile, Thiers was more prepared than ever to brutally crush the Communards by any means necessary, including taking advantage of information from spies based in Paris. He had faced a no-confidence vote on 11 May after false rumours had leaked out that he

was considering a compromise permitting Communard leaders to escape. Thiers won by 490 to 9, and the renewed support only made him more ruthless. Thiers now spoke even more menacingly, saying that he was obliged to order 'dreadful measures', because at the bottom of his heart he knew that he represented what was 'right' against 'the crimes' of the Communards.³⁹

Thiers made good use of Parisian spies, and the number of spies passing information back to Versailles seemed to have increased dramatically. Charles Lullier, a drunken, unstable National Guard commander, attempted to lure *fédéré* officers to the Versailles side with money provided to him by Thiers. A clandestine Versaillais military organisation, led by Colonel Charles Corbin, was also at work within Paris. Thiers's efforts were not always successful, however. Versailles troops, among them Albert Hans and the Volunteers of the Seine, moved into the Bois-de-Boulogne where they were vulnerable to Communard shells, fully expecting that treason paid for handsomely by Thiers would open the gate. The gate remained shut.⁴⁰

Thiers had tried to bribe General Dombrowski to sell out the Commune for a huge sum (rumoured to be 500,000 francs), asking him to free up several gates in the ramparts to let in Versaillais troops and arrest various Communard leaders. He had no luck. Dombrowski, 'a small, thin, blond man, curt, nervous, with an energetic, thin and military bearing', had served as secretary of the Polish section of the International and was a veteran of the unsuccessful Polish uprising against Russian rule in Congress Poland in 1863. False rumours here and there called Dombrowski a Prussian agent, perhaps because part of historic Poland lay within Prussia. Dombrowski's friend Bronislaw Wolowski went to Versailles to meet with Minister of Interior Louis Picard, telling him that Dombrowski would never betray the Commune. The Polish general considered Thiers a friend of imperial Russia, and thus his enemy, and Dombrowski believed that he could help Poland by delivering France from 'the wolves who exploit it'. Picard asked Wolowski to try again with Dombrowski. Hedging his bets, Wolowski asked for passports, if need be, for Dombrowski and other Polish officers, should they decide to leave Paris. In that case, a train would be waiting in Saint-Denis to take the Poles to the frontier.⁴¹

Although Thiers failed to win over Dombrowski and was therefore denied easy access to Paris on 12 May, he would not be held off for long. The Commune, having ignored Rossel's keen advice on how to defend the city, instead focused its efforts on destroying prominent

symbols of the old order. These public destructions, while cathartic and popular among working-class Parisians, did nothing to slow or warn off the Versaillais.

Communards had been calling for the destruction of Adolphe Thiers's house in Paris since mid-April, and it finally came tumbling down on 15 May. When John Leighton walked by workmen had already begun to knock down the right side of the building: 'a pickaxe was leaning against a loosened stone; the roof had fallen in . . . The fire rose higher and higher.' Twenty wagons were required to carry away books and *objets d'art* from the house before it crashed to the ground. Gustave Courbet picked up some small statues and other items of artistic value from the floor, transporting them to safety. He reproached the workers for not having taken an inventory. Courbet opposed a proposal to sell Thiers's art to the British, while estimating the value of objects in the house at an incredible 1.5 million francs.⁴²

The destruction of the Vendôme Column was by far the most spectacular Communard attempt at exorcism through demolition. Courbet, in particular, hated the Vendôme Column because it represented Napoleon's empire and thus also that of his nephew. In 1860, he had suggested to the government that it be dismantled. Three years later, Napoleon III dressed his uncle at the top of the column in Roman garb. Since the Franco-Prussian War Courbet had again called for the column to be toppled, arguing that the base of the column could be saved, with the bas-reliefs relating the history of the Republic carted to the Invalides (then still a hospital and retirement home for former army officers, as well as the final resting place of Napoleon). Since the proclamation of the Commune, the painter had suggested that the column with Napoleon standing at the top could be replaced by a more artistic construction representing the glorious events of 18 March. As for the 'block of molten cannons' it would simply be destroyed in its fall. Pyat had proposed the column's destruction to the Commune on 12 April and the Commune voted against the proposal.⁴³

Thousands of people gathered at place Vendôme to witness the destruction at first hand on 16 May. Tickets were in principle required for the event. From the first floor of the Hôtel Mirabeau on place Vendôme, a party of Americans watched the column fall. They sang 'Hail Columbia' while 'some Yankee girl' pounded 'violently' on a piano. A US resident paid \$80 for the privilege of being the last person to go up to the top.⁴⁴

Members of the Commune were prominent in attendance, adorned with red belts and scarves. National guardsmen stood by and musicians played songs of revolution. Cannons were readied to fire celebratory

rounds. Precautions were taken so that the falling column did not crash into nearby buildings. The ceremony was scheduled to take place at 2.00 p.m.⁴⁵

Cables attached to the column finally began to pull. But they snapped and had to be replaced with stronger cables. At 5.45 p.m. a 'dull cracking sound' echoed around. The column began to lean, then snapped into two huge pieces that crashed to the ground, shattering Napoleon. The globe that he carried rolled briefly on the ground below. Several people managed to get past the guards and carried off pieces of the column as souvenirs.⁴⁶ Brief, triumphant speeches followed, and then people began to drift away through the thick dust.

Although photographs of the famous toppling show Courbet and other Communards of note, most of the people there were ordinary, large numbers of them from the People's Paris. Before the Commune, the vast majority would have had no reason to go to place Vendôme, unless they were domestics employed by fancy folk living in the vicinity. They risked being stopped and questioned by the police as to why they were in a neighbourhood in which their appearance and way of speaking seemed out of place. Now some of them had appropriated the *beaux quartiers*. After the column fell, they were photographed in silent triumph, or at least hope. In the early days of the medium, being photographed alone or in family portraits was the province of the bourgeoisie. But now there were numerous photographs of ordinary Communards standing heroically before barricades.⁴⁷

By 17 May, the Army of Versailles had moved even closer to the walls of Paris. Three days later, line troops forced Communard fighters out of Auteuil and back within the walls. Versaillais troops had taken over remaining Communard posts in the villages of Issy, Vanves and Malakoff. Shells rained down on western Paris and many national guardsmen abandoned the ramparts.⁴⁸

Many in the Commune still held out hope that help would arrive from Lyon, Marseille, or other militantly republican cities in which movements for local 'communes' had occurred. No such help came.

At 5.45 p.m. on 17 May all of Paris was shaken by a frightening explosion: the munitions factory on avenue Rapp blew up, killing dozens of workers, most of whom were women. Parisians mistakenly believed that the explosion was the work of a Versaillais attack. The Protestant minister and anarchist Élie Reclus noted that the 'exasperated population' shouted for vengeance – 'one or two more of such days and a return to the September Massacres [of 1792] could become possible'.⁴⁹

Three days later, Reclus observed that the hostage situation 'now takes centre stage with an imposing clarity and a dreadful urgency'. At the meeting of the Committee of Public Safety that day, Citoyen Urbain demanded that five of the hostages be shot immediately in reprisal for the shooting of a *cantinière* by the Versaillais. For its part, *Père Duchêne* denounced Darboy, 'Good for nothing [*Jean-foutre*] number one who is raking it in . . . [and] who exercises the wonderful profession of archbishop of Paris and spy for Bismarck.'⁵⁰

Lawyer Plou tried to convince Rigault that a grand jury (*jury d'accusation*) should be convoked and that the hostages had the right to legal representation. On 18 May, Plou requested that another lawyer defend Darboy, but on the following day the archbishop said that he would defend himself. The next day, Rigault announced the convocation of the grand jury, separating the hostages into two groups, the first consisting of Darboy and the other priests, the second former *sergents-de-ville* (municipal policemen). The jury first considered the cases of the latter, who were returned to prison not knowing if they were to be executed. Darboy and the other ecclesiastics were told that their cases would be heard the following week.⁵¹

The prisoners at Mazas could see each other briefly every day. Darboy, Deguerry and Bonjean were joined by Abbé Laurent Amodrou, arrested on 17 May, after 'the impious' searched Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. When Amadou spoke with Darboy, he said they should speak in Latin, as 'Monseigneur, here the walls have ears and eyes.'⁵²

Ambassador Washburne visited Darboy on 19 May, finding him 'very feeble' and quite ill with 'a kind of pleurisy'. Yet the archbishop seemed 'cheerful, and apparently resigned to any fate that may await him'. Plou found him lying down, 'dressed in an old cassock . . . his features changed, his skin very pale', as he repeated, 'I am sick, very sick.' Guards now brought him brioches and some chocolate. He said he was in no shape to go before the tribunal of the Commune, and if they wanted to shoot him, let it be right there.⁵³

On Saturday 20 May, with the hostage situation unchanged, Reclus reflected on the state of the Commune, now clearly divided 'into two camps'. Tensions between the Central Committee of the National Guard and the government of the Commune remained. Reclus described the fundamental contractions in trying to organise the defence of Paris, now caught between the dictatorial authority of a Committee of Public Safety and 'the ideal aspirations towards a model Republic'. For the latter to exist, the Commune would have to survive. Although the Versaillais were still beyond the ramparts, he worried that if the Communard forces could not

fight off 'the invading hordes . . . the city is massacred, the revolution is lost and everyone subject to the horrors of reprisals that could be without end'. He was right to worry; the very next day, the Versaillais would enter the city.⁵⁴

That night national guardsman Émile Maury awoke at 2.00 a.m. to the sound of drums calling him to guard service near the ramparts. No more than 200 of his battalion showed up, though for once, Maury did. He moved with the small column along the exterior boulevards. Four 'determined *ambulancières*' led the way, followed by a drummer and an officer on horseback. A red flag bobbed among them. At place d'Italie, they stopped and stacked their rifles. Other battalions were supposed to meet them there, but none showed up. Maury and a friend went into a wine shop and decided to return to their homes in Paris, an occurrence that may be increasingly common. When the small column moved on to Gentilly, near Fort Bicêtre, they were not missed.⁵⁵

Maury's battalion was not the only one whose numbers were depleted, and not only because of absentee guardsmen like Maury. Since 21 May, the Versaillais move against Paris had killed at least 4,000 men, and a good number of women and children as well; 3,500 Communard prisoners had been taken.⁵⁶ On that same day, Dombrowski noted that from Point-du-Jour to Porte d'Auteuil the situation was 'bad'. He had only 4,000 fighters in the sector of La Muette, 2,000 at Neuilly, and a mere 200 at Asnières and Saint-Ouen. Troops could not be left on the ramparts, where they were fully exposed to cannon fire from Issy and Moulinaux.⁵⁷ Versaillais shelling was unrelenting.

Still, on that warm and sunny Sunday of 21 May, it was as if nothing were amiss. Somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 people turned out for a Sunday concert in the gardens of the Tuileries. The American W. Pembroke Fetridge found there 'a hot stream of people who belonged to every nationality and rank of life . . . there were shopkeepers and their wives . . . gentlemen whose National Guard trousers were rendered respectable by the grey jacket or blouse of a citizen; humdrum housewives who approved everything, and gaped their admiration of so much gorgeous wall-colouring in the Tuileries Palace.'⁵⁸ Maxime Vuillaume observed an officer wearing medals and polished boots, with a sword at his side and his *képi* in hand, chatting amiably with a rather large bourgeois lady who was fanning herself with a handkerchief. National guardsmen sang 'La Marseillaise', 'Les Girondins', 'Le Chant du Départ' and other classics from the French Revolution. The café-concert singer Madame Bordas, wearing a 'flowing robe, draped with a scarlet sash . . . [standing] like a

warlike apparition . . . a goddess of Liberty from the popular *quartiers*, belted out 'As for the rabble! Well, there . . . That's me!' At the end of the final refrain, she wrapped 'herself in a red flag, pointing with outstretched arm to the invisible enemy, urging us to pursue him with our hatred and crush him mercilessly. The crowd is in raptures.' Two women passed the hat for orphans of the Commune.

Even as the concert went on, shells fired by the Versaillais cannons were now being launched from within the walls of Paris, landing on the Champs-Élysées. One crashed to earth at nearby place de la Concorde. At 4.30 p.m., the concert ended, but not before a lieutenant-colonel jumped up on the stage and announced, 'Citizens, Monsieur Thiers promised to enter Paris yesterday. But he is not here.' He invited everybody back for another concert in a week's time. Posters announced a performance at the Opera the next day. Those attending a club meeting that evening heard a report that a Versaillais attack had been turned back with losses of at least 4,000 line troops – which was clearly not the case – with the assurance that the enemy would face more of the same if they dared attack again. Paris seemed calm.⁵⁹

Monsieur Thiers was not in Paris, but his troops were, and for the moment no one in the Tuileries Gardens knew it. A full-fledged assault on Paris had been planned for 22 or 23 May. But at about 3.00 p.m. on 21 May, Jules Ducatel, an employee of Ponts-et-Chaussées, had signalled from the ramparts at the Point-au-Jour to Versailles forces camped not far away that Communard forces had left bastions 65 and 66 undefended. Porte Saint-Cloud was also vulnerable. A Versaillais naval officer entered cautiously, looking left and right, and then went into several nearby houses to make sure that it was not a trap. Returning to his trench, he telegraphed generals with the astonishing news. Within an hour, line troops commanded by General Félix Douay had entered the capital. Porte de Saint-Cloud and then Porte d'Auteuil fell without resistance, and Versaillais troops soon snared 100 prisoners at a munitions storage area on rue Beethoven.

The Committee of Public Safety learned from a message sent by Dombrowski that Versaillais forces were inside Paris, advancing through Passy. They sent several men to La Muette to confirm this, and the men somehow returned 'with the most reassuring news' that all was well. Delescluze, incredibly enough, refused to allow the ringing of the tocsin and simply denied that the Versaillais had penetrated the walls of Paris.⁶⁰

After having deserted his battalion early that morning, Émile Maury and his father walked along deserted boulevards and could hear gunfire far away. Everything 'seemed to suggest that something awful was going to

happen'. The tocsin, which by now was ringing its call of great alarm, and the roll of drums followed them home, while the gunfire in the distance appeared as a 'shroud of death and of mourning over the great city'. Émile believed that the Commune could not win. He did not want to die in a revolution that he did not really understand.⁶¹

That day Archibald Forbes, a British journalist, wanted to interview General Dombrowski, who was overseeing the defence of Paris from the Château de la Muette. At the Ministry of War on the Left Bank, the British journalist was astounded by 'the utter absence of red tape and bureaucracy there . . . a shock to the system of the Briton'. He there received a pass to allow him 'to witness the military operations in the capacity of a correspondent', both inside and outside of Paris. Both had been granted with a 'simple "fine"'.

The Commune had requisitioned his horse, however. Forbes needed a carriage. As they passed Pont de Jéna, the battery on Trocadéro opened up. The Versaillais cannons on Mont Valérien replied. Telling Forbes he had children and would take him no further, the driver deposited the journalist on the Grande Rue de Passy. Nearby houses were virtually empty 'but a large colony of shell-holes' could be seen. Forbes saw Commune soldiers and even some sailors lounging 'idly about the pavements'. No one seemed at all afraid, although Versaillais shells were landing 'pretty freely'.

General Dombrowski greeted Forbes cordially, even with enthusiasm. 'We are in a deplorably comic situation here,' he said, with a smile and a shrug, 'for the fire is both hot and continuous.' The likable 'neat, dapper little fellow . . . with very little gold lace' spoke no English but, like Forbes, was fluent in German. His staff of eight to ten young men 'seemed thoroughly up to their work'. Dombrowski chatted as he read dispatches and ate, asking Forbes if he knew anything about possible German intervention. A battalion commander came to report that the Versaillais forces were pouring through the gate of Billancourt. A shell hit the château but the general did not seem worried. An adjutant took Forbes up to the roof, where they could see puffs of smoke as Versaillais sharpshooters tried to pick off *fédérés* on the ramparts. Dombrowski admitted that he would have to abandon the ramparts from Porte d'Auteuil to the Seine. He counted on the second line of defence and believed that the Army of Versailles would have to fall back. The Polish commander insisted 'there is plenty of fight still in our fellows, especially when I am leading them'.

Dombrowski asked Forbes to follow him as he left to observe for himself the progress Versaillais troops were making. They scurried down rue Mozart, with Versaillais guns 'in full roar'. As they came upon

reinforcements waiting for Dombrowski on quai d'Auteuil, they learned that the Versaillais also had taken Porte Saint-Cloud. Communard forces had begun to fall back right and left, and brief counter-attacks failed. Forbes lost sight of Dombrowski and never saw him again.⁶²

Forbes himself retreated to the second line of Communard defence, which stiffened behind the railway line. By 11.00 p.m., all was quiet. Forbes made it to rue de Rome, and then Trocadéro, in a dense fog.

As Dombrowski orchestrated the city's defence, even more line troops marched through the gates of Auteuil, Passy, Sèvres, Saint-Cloud, and Versailles, readying for a massive assault at dawn.

Arthur de Grandeffe entered Paris on 21 May along with the Volunteers of the Seine. The residents of Passy, a relatively prosperous neighbourhood, treated them as long-lost friends, telling them stories of Communards smashing crucifixes. A lady offered Grandeffe and others soup that she had prepared for them. Beyond, they came upon dead insurgents. One was still alive, sitting on the ground, propped up against a wall. No one left the ranks of the Volunteers to help him. Grandeffe considered the prisoners he saw 'the scum of Paris'. One could not reason with them. In his view, they had to be dealt with harshly. If not, French society risked falling back into 'barbarism'.⁶³

After camping in the park of Malmaison, Albert Hans and his battalion of the Volunteers of the Seine moved to Rueil, where they awaited orders to return to Asnières. In the evening, a rumour spread that line troops had passed through the ramparts at Pont-du-Jour, easily taking Auteuil, and, commanded by Clinchant, were moving rapidly towards Trocadéro. The 'joyous' Volunteers of the Seine soon followed, crossing a wooden bridge, the horses and wagons generating a rumble that sounded like distant gunfire.⁶⁴

From the moment the first Versaillais troops entered Paris, it became clear that Communards could expect little in the way of mercy from them. Some of the first summary executions carried out by the Versaillais took place in Passy and Auteuil, where there had been virtually no fighting. A reporter for *Le Gaulois* came upon about thirty bodies, and asked around. Troops had lined up victims along a ditch and dispatched them with a *mitrailleuse*. A merchant confirmed that the first killings had involved two men put up against the door of a tobacco shop.⁶⁵

Eager to finish with the 'bandits', the Volunteers of the Seine reached Porte d'Auteuil. They passed overturned cannons with shattered carriages, a burnt-out railway station, and houses that had been blown apart. The

Volunteers came upon the bodies of *fédérés* whom even Albert Hans had to admit had shown courage by remaining at their position as shells rained down from the Bois-de-Boulogne. One man was still breathing, and, after some Volunteers threatened to shoot him, was finally given a drink of eau-de-vie, and then left along the side of the road with a blanket thrown over him, before a priest or someone from the neighbourhood arrived with a stretcher.

Coming upon a half-destroyed fort along the ramparts, Hans and the others came upon more bodies and the first group of prisoners they had seen. The boulevard Beauséjour was littered with *képis*, military sacs and even guardsmen's trousers whose occupants had hurriedly left them behind for fear of being arrested. At the Château de la Muette, where Archibald Forbes had interviewed Dombrowski the day before, the troops found several dozen Communards hiding in woods and gardens. A concierge had hidden about a dozen Communard volunteers, young men and boys aged twelve to seventeen. They let the boys go.

In a charitable establishment for young women, which Communards had converted into a small barracks, Hans was outraged to find graffiti and obscene drawings scrawled on the walls, and empty bottles and garbage that had been left here and there. Finally Hans reached the Arc-de-Triomphe and the *beaux quartiers* of western Paris. Here, as in Passy, they were saluted with great enthusiasm. A woman came down from her apartment, dutifully followed by several servants, who distributed cigars, wine, bread and other food to the soldiers. She insisted that the troops return to her residence to rest up briefly.

Moving past the church of Saint-Augustin, Hans reached Parc Monceau. When they arrived, troops had just executed a dozen 'deserters' – that is, soldiers fighting for the Commune who were considered to still be in the French army. The scene smelled of fresh blood, in sharp contrast to the spring scent of the surrounding greenery.

After camping at place Wagram, the Volunteers took their first prisoners. Several claimed not to have fought, yet their rifles, which they had not had time to clean, revealed otherwise. One admitted that he had participated in a recent encounter at Levallois but had been in the National Guard because he had no work. 'This poor devil' had been caught between being 'mistreated' by the Communards if he did not fight or being taken by the Versaillais if he did.

At rue Cardinet, some *fédérés* called out from behind a barricade that they would surrender, wanting assurance that, if they laid down their arms, they would not be harmed. They hesitated. A couple of the Volunteers,

including Hans, went forward and convinced three of them to give up. One kept repeating, 'I did as the others. I could not do anything other than they had.' Believing that he had come upon someone who was clueless and not a scoundrel, Hans told him to remain quiet, fearing that he could well end up like the Communards he had seen as they passed Parc Monceau. Hans spoke with another *fédéré*, whom he believed to be drunk, when shots came from the Communard barricade. The Versaillais responded with fire and Hans took refuge in a shop. Eventually the remaining *fédérés* abandoned their barricade and fled.

Hans and other Volunteers were ordered to take the prisoners to a post, from which they would be transferred to a court-martial. Hans worried about the guardsman whom he had taken prisoner, fearing that he would be shot, particularly as he was technically a deserter from the army. Moreover, the prisoner's *livret* recounted only several punishments for insignificant lapses. The captive asked Hans if he thought he would be shot. Hans told him that he should simply deny his name and gave him a story to relate, in the hope that he would be sent back to the mass of prisoners. When the Volunteer asked the man to repeat to him the story, he was incapable of doing it. Hans then turned him over to someone he knew of good heart. By chance, the plan worked, and Albert Hans saved his life.

Moving past the remains of Communard barricades at place Pereire, Hans and other Volunteers of the Seine came upon some very sad-looking prisoners. Then when a shot was fired from a nearby house, soldiers poured into it, finding a Communard sergeant. The commander grabbed him and ordered his immediate execution. The sergeant begged for mercy, and suddenly bolted from the wall against which he had been placed, reaching a door, aided by shots arriving from somewhere. The Volunteers fired, but he made good his escape.

As the Volunteers of the Seine passed along the avenue de Saint-Ouen on the northern edge of Paris, residents expressed anything but good feeling to the Versaillais, particularly the women, 'strong in their weakness' as Hans liked to say. One of them who was greeted informed them with pride that her husband was fighting with the *fédérés* not far away, and that he would break their heads. Hans had to admit that some of the Volunteers arrested people in the *quartier* for no particular reason, angered by such defiance.⁶⁶

Edmond Goncourt spent Sunday 'in fear of a setback for the Versailles troops'. From his window he could hear in the distance 'the regular tramp of marching men who are going to replace others, as happens every night.

Come now! It is the effect of my imagination. I go back to bed, but this time it really is the drums, it really is the bugles! I hurry back to the window . . . Above the shouts of "To Arms!" rise in great waves the tragically sonorous notes of the tocsin, which has begun to ring in all the churches – a sinister sound which fills me with joy and marks the beginning of the end of hateful tyranny for Paris.⁶⁷

That morning, Élie Reclus awoke to the news that Versaillais troops were moving rapidly inside the walls of Paris. While walking down rue Saint-Pères on the Left Bank, a bullet whizzed past his head. He suspected that this was the work of 'some good bourgeois, attached to "order"'. In the Seventh Arrondissement, it was not difficult to see 'secret jubilation of all the concierges, shop owners, merchants of holy articles, and the religious men and women who make up the base of the population there. Their eyes follow you so that they can denounce you as soon as possible to the first gendarme or policeman' who represents their cause. Reclus could see that Communard resistance lacked a well-developed plan to defend the Left Bank. Moreover, around the École militaire and Les Invalides, Bonapartists abounded and the noble faubourg Saint-Germain still had its niche of Legitimists, with the residence of the Jesuits not far away at Saint-Sulpice, along with other religious congregations. Medical students also marched under the clerical banner. Enthusiastic calls for heroic resistance and the stirring sounds of the tocsin signalling grave danger, the roll of drums and the alarmed cry of trumpets were one thing; effective organisation, another.⁶⁸

National guardsmen were now rushing about preparing to fight, although Delescluze still denied that the Versaillais were inside the city walls. British subject John Leighton asked a guardsman if the news was true. Yes, he replied, 'we are betrayed'. The red trousers of line troops had been seen in the distance. He heard the heavy sound of rolling wheels and beheld a 'strange sight': 'a mass of women in rags, livid, horrible, and yet grand, with the Phrygian cap [of the French Revolution] on their heads, and the skirts of their robes tied round their waists, were harnessed to a *mitrailleuse*, which they dragged along at full speed; other women pushing vigorously behind'. He followed along, to the point where a barricade was under hurried construction, when a boy confronted him: 'Don't you be acting the spy here, or I will break your head open as if you were a Versaillais.' An old man with a long beard told the boy that that would be a waste of needed ammunition, and turned to Leighton and politely asked 'Will you be so kind as to go and fetch those stones from the corner here?' Leighton complied, and, when the barricade was completed, the guardsman told him, 'You had better be off, if you care for your life.'⁶⁹ A Parisian

living near Porte Saint-Denis awoke at 6.00 a.m. on 21 May to hear newspaper vendors announcing the 'Great Victory of Dombrowski at Neuilly'. He stayed in his room all day, smoking his pipe and reading Communard newspapers. After going to bed, he was awakened about midnight by the tocsin from the bells of the churches of Paris. Below, national guardsmen were moving along the boulevards. He did not think much of it. The next morning, the same newspaper vendors were out early, but shouting the same news as the day before. He sent out the concierge to buy more papers, who returned with the news that Versaillais troops had entered Paris. Parisians on the boulevard below seemed 'worried and stupified'.⁷⁰

A sizeable barricade went up at the base of rue Saint-Denis. The Parisians living near Porte Saint-Denis at the other end of the street watched as Communard fighters who had been fighting at the Church of the Madeleine and place Vendôme returned to their neighbourhoods, some wounded. In the evening a delegate of the Commune for the *arrondissement*, a large man about fifty or sixty years of age, turned up. Looking around, he ordered the construction of several barricades, instructing several people standing nearby to help out. A paver seemed to be overseeing the work, and about a dozen children joined in. Soon a National Guard platoon of a dozen men showed up. They parked their rifles and slept on the pavement. By now shells had begun to scream above the building at Porte Saint-Denis. One witness began to wonder if the barricades below would keep him and his neighbours from getting out if the shooting drew nearer. Yet he went out to dine. Returning home, he heard shouted orders to turn off the lights and close windows. Then all fell still.⁷¹

Soon 50,000 line troops were within Paris and within seventeen hours of the first breach of the ramparts 130,000 Versaillais soldiers, along with artillery, had entered the city.⁷² Soldiers moved easily down avenue de Versailles and then along the *quai*, sweeping aside a single barricade that stood between them and Trocadéro. That no Communard cannon fire greeted them reflected the ultimate lack of coordination and inadequacy of the Commune's military defence. Versaillais line troops reached Trocadéro before daybreak on 22 May. The Marquis de Compiègne stood there, 'Paris stretched out beneath our feet. Joy took over all our faces.' The Versaillais had taken the barely-defended Trocadéro along with 1,500 prisoners. The fall of Trocadéro shattered the illusion for many Communards that they could hold off the Versaillais.⁷³

There were more signs during the assault of the violence that was to come. Near Trocadéro, a Versaillais officer called Filippi came across a

wounded National Guard officer lying on a stretcher. He ordered four soldiers of the 79th regiment to carry the man to an improvised care facility. When they grumbled, Filippi reminded them that a wounded combatant was 'sacred' and insisted they carry out the order. He had just begun to walk away when he heard shots that told him that 'the unfortunate wounded man had been finished off'.⁷⁴

Versaillais forces moved towards Champs-Élysées. They took the vast Palace of Industry, used by the Communards to store supplies and as a hospital, which Thiers's forces transformed into a prison. The capture of 30,000 rations reduced food available to the *fédérés*. Early that morning, the tricolour flag fluttered above the Arc-de-Triomphe. Hundreds of Communards had simply abandoned their posts in western Paris, so the Versaillais faced little or no resistance. A large column moved along boulevards towards Porte de Clichy, thus preparing for an ultimate attack on Montmartre.

It quickly became apparent – to Versaillais forces and Parisians alike – just how unprepared the Commune was. At daybreak on Monday, Archibald Forbes could easily see Versaillais forces advancing. Heading towards the Champs-Élysées he came upon newly arrived line troops in their red trousers. The Versaillais faced not cannon fire but only rifle shots and now held boulevards Haussmann and Malesherbes and the entry to rue Royale. Beyond stood imposing Communard barricades, the only Communard defences that slowed the Versaillais down. Built of furniture, omnibus, carriages and mattresses, as well as stones and sandbags, one blocked rue Rivoli and the other rue Saint-Honoré. Communards forced Forbes at bayonet point to add chunks of pavement to the barricade, despite his insistence that he was British. His immediate goal was to reach his hotel on Chaussée d'Antin and have breakfast. Back in his room, he discovered a bullet hole in his tobacco pouch.⁷⁵

On the Left Bank, a force commanded by Joseph Vinoy moved along the *quais*, nearing the Seventh Arrondissement, while another under General Ernest de Cissey duplicated the strategy on the Right Bank by moving along the exterior arteries towards Porte de Vanves. Both were protected by Versaillais guns now pounding away from Trocadéro, where MacMahon set up his headquarters. Already 1,500 national guardsmen had been taken prisoner.⁷⁶

Communard generals and civilian leaders, meanwhile, provided little or no direction to those defending Paris. Dombrowski sent Louise Michel and a few others to warn the Montmartre vigilance committee that the Versaillais army had entered Paris. 'I didn't know what time it was. The

night was calm and beautiful. What did the time matter? What mattered now was that the revolution should not be defeated, even in death.' The cannons on Montmartre were still. In any case, several weeks of neglect had left them in poor shape. By the time they began firing, at about 9.00 p.m., the Versaillais were already well ensconced.⁷⁷

In little more than twenty-four hours, the Versaillais troops held about a third of Paris, and now paused so that their reserves could catch up. They had encountered very little resistance from residents – those who had not already left the city – in the fancier neighbourhoods of the western *arrondissements*. They held all of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Arrondissements, most of the Seventh, including Les Invalides, the École Militaire and the Quai d'Orsay, the Eighth, and some of the Seventeenth. Much of the Commune's gunpowder had gone up in the explosion on avenue Rapp. Some unrealistic optimism remained. A National Guard officer Leighton met in a café told him that a good chunk of the Left Bank had fallen to the Versaillais. But the officer remained confident: 'Street fighting is our affair, you see,' he insisted. 'In such battles as that, the merest *gamin* from Belleville knows more about it than MacMahon.'⁷⁸ But the Commune at this point stood very little chance of surviving and some Communard fighters must have begun wondering if their only hope was not to be massacred. There was already quite a bit of evidence to the contrary.

Versaillais troops continued to gun down captured Communards. They marched sixteen national guardsmen to the Babylone barracks on rue du Bac and shot them dead. Soldier Julien Poirier saw soldiers tear into a building where they had seen a woman enter carrying a red flag. They found her in the attic, with weapons. They hauled her down the stairs, but she never reached the bottom. She was killed on the way.⁷⁹

An American family on avenue Friedland welcomed the Versaillais troops as saviours. Several Communard barricades had been hastily constructed nearby and a few shots were exchanged, but that was about it. They watched as Communards pushed cannons down the avenue as fast as they could. A short time later, line troops arrived. The mother of the family ordered the servants to distribute wine and cigarettes to the soldiers, and her young daughter chatted with them. The woman overheard one of them bragging that he had run through five 'communists' that morning with his bayonet, which was bent and caked with blood.

The young girl was skipping in front of their door when she saw a Versaillais officer and several soldiers dragging along a man begging for his life. The scene made the girl's 'blood run cold, [her] heart stop beating, to

see that poor wretch on his knees, screaming to be spared, and the officer holding a pistol at his head'. The soldiers kicked him to make him get up. Some people watching from a window above the street called out to the officer not to shoot him in front of women and children, 'so they pushed and kicked him till they came to the end of our street', where they shot him dead. One of the daughters of their concierge later told her that she had wanted to see him killed, and had been disappointed because she had reached the corner a bit late. The girl had seen a lot in a very short time, more than enough for a lifetime.⁸⁰

Summary executions had become routine, even organised. French commanders, humiliated in defeat at the hands of Prussia and its allies but seven months earlier, appeared to be taking revenge on ordinary Parisians. The Marquis de Compiègne recalled that too: 'The orders to shoot anyone taken prisoner were formal, and the soldiers were exasperated by the fires in Paris' and by resistance they encountered, 'without hope and without goal'.⁸¹ The Versaillais troops, many if not most of them of rural origin, had been told that the Communards were lawless insurgents and criminals. As a result, many of the soldiers believed that they could kill captured Communards with the blessing of their officers, who would at least turn a blind eye. Would the killings become a massacre?

CHAPTER 6

Bloody Week Begins

WITH VERSAILLAIS TROOPS POURING INTO PARIS THROUGH THE western gates and much of western Paris having fallen, the next three days – the harrowing of Hell – would be crucial, determining the fate of the Paris Commune and thousands of people who believed in it. Although barricades had been constructed across narrow streets and in places blocked major squares and wide boulevards, these were not enough to hold off the Versaillais for long. Communard defences on the heights of Montmartre, where the Commune had begun sixty-two days earlier, presented the greatest challenge for the Army of Versailles, particularly as Communard fighters would increasingly be forced to fall back to their own neighbourhood strongholds, leaving the rest of Paris at the mercy of the invading troops.

On Monday 22 May, about 2.00 p.m., Rigault ordered the transfer of Darboy, Abbé Gaspard Deguerry, Bonjean and some other hostages – thirty-eight in all – from Mazas to the nearby prison of La Roquette, which was even more in the heart of People's Paris. Gaston Da Costa, Rigault's faithful assistant, requisitioned two wagons for the journey. The prisoners were assembled on the ground floor of Mazas, some seeing each other for the first time in six weeks. Darboy, wrapped in an old raincoat, alluded to the approaching end 'at last' as prisoners and guards waited an hour for a wagon to arrive. The move to La Roquette did not auger well. A hostile, threatening crowd of men and women, some wearing work-clothes, surrounded the wagon. Da Costa remembered being unnerved by 'the shrieks of the delirious mob' in faubourg Saint-Antoine. Perny, one of the missionary priests, recalled that the crowd was 'exasperated', shouting

ferociously against the 'papists!' Under his breath, he said to Darboy, 'So there are your people!', calling for the 'priests of Bonaparte' to be thrown into the Seine. Perny recounted that he had spent twenty years living 'among savages' as a missionary and he had never seen anything 'so horrible' as the faces of the men, women and children who 'raved' at them during the painful journey from Mazas to La Roquette. Deguerry, who as *curé* of Madeline had never seen such neighbourhoods, asked on several occasions, 'Where are we?'¹

The fates of Darboy and the other hostages would be tied to the rising swell of anti-clericalism that gripped Paris. Gaston Da Costa described the mood as one of 'legitimate exasperation' that had increased with military reverses. Gustave Courbet recalled the hardening tone of the Communards: 'There was nothing left to do. Despair had taken over and with it despairing methods. The drunkenness of carnage and of destruction had taken over this people ordinarily so mild, but so fearsome when pushed to the brink . . . We will die if we must, shouted men, women and children, but we will not be sent to Cayenne.'²

When the prisoners arrived at La Roquette, the clerk went through the formalities of their incarceration. Seeing that they were to be in 'holding cells' the hostages had reason to fear that their stay at La Roquette was to be short indeed. Outside the gate to La Roquette, members of the 180th and 206th battalions of the National Guard from the neighbourhood stood watch. The thirty-four-year-old director of La Roquette, Citizen Jean-Baptise François, was decked out in Communard red: belt, tie, scarf and trousers. Small, thin and pale, he was a hard-drinking worker who had been in debt before being hired by the Commune. He had spent four months in prison for a speech given at a public meeting in 1870. He lived with a woman on rue de Charonne. François, who hated the clergy, signed a paper: 'Received, four priests and magistrates'. When a guard referred to Darboy as 'Monseigneur', a young national guardsman snapped, 'There are no seigneurs here, only citizens.'³

La Roquette consisted of three large buildings. The offices were in the building on the street, which also had a chapel, which had not been in use of late. There were about forty guards always present. Darboy and the others moved from Mazas prison were in the fourth section, the archbishop in cell number one. Other hostages were held in the third floor in the opposite building, thus close to Père Lachaise cemetery, a proximity that could not be missed. Cells were extremely small and dirty, without a table or a chair, even more spartan than those of Mazas. Insects abounded. An open but barred space linked the cells; thus inmates could talk easily.⁴

From their cells prisoners heard the sounds of explosions. As cannon fire moved closer, one priest cried out, 'In two days, we will all be saved!' Someone had earlier managed to sneak in communion hosts hidden in an empty milk container, providing the priests with some consolation. The bell awakened the prisoners at 6.00 a.m. At 3.00 p.m., the hostages were allowed to walk in the prison courtyard. Darboy, who was nauseous, was treated by the prison doctor. The hostages were returned to their cells at 4.00 p.m., where they awaited food brought by young prisoners, amid the tension of not knowing what the Commune planned to do with them, and fearing the worst.⁵

Versaillais troops moved swiftly through western Paris. Ernest Vizetelly watched a gendarme carrying a dispatch bag riding down the street from Saint-Philippe-du-Roule. As he approached, 'a gun-barrel gleamed between the slightly opened shutters across the street'. A shot rang out. The gendarme threw up his arms and fell from his horse, dead or dying. Several Versaillais soldiers ran up to help him, and the others raced to the house from which the shot appeared to have been fired – a trace of smoke gave away the location – and battered down the door. In a few minutes, the soldiers emerged from the building with 'a grey-haired dishevelled woman, whose scanty clothing was badly torn'. They pushed her quickly up against a wall, 'but she gave no sign of fear. She drew herself up and answered tauntingly, "Well done! Well done! You killed my son this morning, and now I have killed one of you. You bunch of cowards!"' Her cry, 'Long live the Commune!' expired in her throat as she was shot, falling face-first on the pavement.⁶

In retreat, Communard soldiers returned to central Paris from the fighting in the western neighbourhoods. On rue Montmartre, one of them shouted, practically in tears, 'Betrayed! Betrayed! They came in where we did not expect them!' Nearby shops closed or simply did not open. A newspaper vendor on Tuesday shouted 'Get one today! You will no longer have one tomorrow!' At place d'Italie, a Communard stronghold in the Thirteenth Arrondissement, some national guardsmen hurriedly disposed of their rifles, muttering 'It is the end!'⁷

On the morning of Monday, 22 May, while the hostages awaited their fate, Commune leaders met at the Hôtel de Ville. Félix Pyat was among them, but not for long; he soon slunk out of Paris and managed to reach London. Soon after the meeting, a proclamation signed by Charles Delescluze appeared on the walls of Paris: 'Citizens, enough of militarism, no more fancy officers sporting decorations on their uniforms. Give way

to the people, to bare-knuckle fighters! The hour of revolutionary war has arrived!’

As during the French Revolution, the *levée en masse* (mass conscription) had been proclaimed. The Commune began to organise defences in the *arrondissements* not yet occupied by the Versaillais, hoping to use to advantage the narrow streets of People’s Paris. Communard defenders assumed that Adolphe Thiers’s army would launch frontal assaults on barricades. A swarm of men, women and children reinforced barricades that already existed, or put together new ones. The role of women became even more important in the defence of the Commune because barricades took on such great importance. The American W. Pembroke Fetridge watched about thirty women demand a *mitrailleuse* to protect the barricade defending place du Palais-Royal: ‘They all wore a band of crepe round the left arm; each one had lost a husband, a lover, a son, or a brother, whom she had sworn to avenge. Horses being at this time scarce in the service of the Commune, they harnessed themselves, and dragged [the *mitrailleuse*] off, fastening their skirts round their waists lest they should prove an impediment to their march. Others followed, bearing the caissons filled with munitions. The last carried the flag.’⁸ These were ordinary women catapulted into an exceptional situation, one that had begun with their role in defending the cannons of Montmartre on 18 March.

At faubourg Saint-Antoine, women and children built barricades, together with workers in smocks, calling on passers-by to lend a hand: ‘Let’s go, citizen, a helping hand for the Republic!’⁹ Despite the rapid Versaillais advances, Delescluze remained convinced that the Commune could hold Paris by defending it *quartier by quartier*, street by street. But the stirring sound of the tocsin and calls for a ‘revolutionary war’ could not compensate for numerical inferiority and chaotic organisation.

It was more difficult to barricade boulevards than narrow streets in workers’ *quartiers*, as Baron Georges Haussmann had fully understood. The Army of Versailles could blast away at barricades blocking these major arteries, while using tactics of outflanking the defensive impediments. However, for the most part, troops did not attack barricades head-on, to the surprise of Communard defenders. The Versaillais circumvented major defences by sweeping through adjoining streets and going into nearby buildings, enabling them to fire down on barricades. Wickham Hoffman watched line soldiers entering ‘adjoining houses, passing from roof to roof, and occupying the upper windows, till finally they commanded the barricade, and fired down upon its defenders’. At Porte Saint-Denis, the Fifth Corps overcame twelve barricades without

attacking any of them from the front. It soon became clear that the Communards' chances of holding on to a barricade depended on their ability to hold adjacent buildings.¹⁰

John Leighton, no friend of the Commune, noted that in some places people seemed to greet these dangerous events with 'silence and apathy'. Life seemed to go on strangely as usual on some major streets: 'Some ribbons here and there brighten up the shop-windows; bare-headed shop-girls pass by with a smile on their lips; men look after them as they trip along.' Yet at this point only old men dared be seen without a National Guard uniform. Overall, 'solitude has something terrible about it just now . . . Quite a crowd collects round a little barefoot girl, who is singing at the corner of a street.' The theatres were now virtually empty. Laughter seemed 'out of place'. Death was in the air.

A sergeant stopped Leighton when he was out walking, asking him why he was not in uniform. The man was a Spaniard, to whom the Englishman had given some cigars during the Prussian siege. Leighton replied that it was not his turn, and the Spanish sergeant answered sarcastically, 'No, of course it's not, it never is. You have been taking your ease this long time, while others have been getting killed.' He seemed to have forgotten about the cigars and escorted Leighton to Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, where about fifty men who had avoided National Guard service were being held. All ended well for the moment, as Leighton pulled off an improbable bluff, telling the officer who questioned him that he was a prize-fighter, entreating his stunned interrogator, 'Be kind enough to allow me to depart instantly.'¹¹

Élie Reclus walked down rue des Saint-Pères in the Sixth Arrondissement, his perambulation curtailed when a nervous guardsman told him that he could go no further, while 'worried, sombre, concerned figures' built barricades, preparing for the onslaught. Concierges immediately began relating their narrow escapes to attentive listeners, describing how they had absorbed Communard bullets with mattresses placed in windows, and how they looked for fleeing Communards trying to hide in their houses. One proudly related, 'I found three of them in my court; I told a lieutenant they were there, and he had them shot. But I wish they would take them away; I cannot keep dead bodies in the house.' 'Citizen' quickly disappeared as a greeting, 'under pain of being suspect', replaced by 'the undemocratic *Monsieur*'.¹²

Communard resistance stiffened briefly on Monday at place de la Concorde, where Napoléon Gaillard's 'château' – the massive barricade – stood. A young woman climbed on top and waved a red flag. Versaillais

troops shot her dead as an American family looked down from an elegant apartment above. They also watched as an elderly female resister was put face first up against a wall. Before they gunned her down, she turned and offered her killers a gesture of defiance, amid bodies and shattered poles that had proudly held the gas lights of the enormous *place*.¹³ There, too, Communards had hoped for a frontal attack by the Versaillais, but the line troops simply went around, taking nearby buildings and firing down on Napoléon Gaillard's giant barricade. When buildings looming above barricades were still occupied by wealthy Parisians, this made things easier. The fall of the *place de la Concorde* left open central Paris to the Versaillais troops.

Nearby on *rue Royale*, at the corner of *rue Saint-Honoré*, Communards hung a dead rat from a miniature gallows on a barricade, with a sign indicating that this would be the fate of Thiers and MacMahon, 'who have so long devoured the people'. However, Parisians looking from upper reaches of their buildings towards the west could now see soldiers wearing red trousers in the distance. Closer to them, they could also spot units of *fédérés* moving about in disarray.¹⁴

Against the reconstituted and, at 130,000 strong, relatively enormous forces of Versailles the Commune could muster only around 15,000–16,000 fighters, if that. It was increasingly becoming a mismatch, despite the resolute courage of so many Parisians. The Committee of Public Safety met at the *Hôtel de Ville*, amid the chaos of the arrival of messengers carrying increasingly bad news. Conflicting orders, for example, coming from the Commune's Delegate for War and from the Central Committee of the National Guard and individual officers, reflected the absence of effective military leadership. Above all, they reflected the virtual impossibility of centralising the authority over planning the defence of Paris and, in particular, over the National Guard, on which the Commune would depend for its survival.¹⁵

On the Left Bank, General Ernest de Cissey's army moved easily towards Champs-de-Mars, Les Invalides, the *École militaire* and the *Quai d'Orsay*, taken by Monday evening. *Fédérés* were running for their lives, crossing the *Seine* in the direction of the *Tuileries*, where the concert had been held less than a day earlier. When a barricade on *rue Bellechasse* was taken, Versaillais soldiers overran a telegraph office, killing everyone there, including a canteen woman. Daniel Salvador, composer and director of the Conservatory, fought with Communards on *rue de l'Université*. When the Versaillais advanced, he took refuge in a nearby house, but troops found him. He was shot after being given a moment to straighten his necktie, his body tossed into a common grave.¹⁶

Later that day, Cissey's army reached Gare Montparnasse on the Left Bank, an important point left defended by only twenty-six men. Troops moved through the outer districts of the Fifteenth, Fourteenth and even the Thirteenth Arrondissements, beginning to encircle the central Left Bank. Clinchant's army continued a similar strategy on the Right Bank, moving along the ramparts. By nightfall, the Versaillais held half of the city, including all or most of ten *arrondissements*. They held a line that stretched from below Montmartre to rue de la Paix and the Opera on the Right Bank and much of the Sixth Arrondissement on the Left Bank.

The battle drew closer and closer to Edmond de Goncourt's apartment. Workmen arrived with orders to block the boulevard at rue Vivienne, and they began to construct a barricade under his very windows. But they worked slowly, not putting 'much heart into it. Some move two or three paving stones; others, to satisfy their consciences, give two or three blows at the asphalt with their picks.' When shots rang out, they quickly left, replaced by national guardsmen who were soon carrying bodies away. In a few minutes only a few boys were left to defend the barricade, as 'bullets make the leaves of a little tree spreading over their heads rain on them'. A guardsman bravely ventured out to try to retrieve the body of a woman killed in the fighting, but was hit as he insulted the line troops firing at him. A second guardsman also tried, and he, too, was shot, falling on the woman. It was now nightfall, and someone in an adjacent building foolishly lit a pipe, drawing fire from the Versaillais. Goncourt could barely see from his windows in a 'dark Paris night without a glimmer of gas'.¹⁷

With the Versaillais in complete control of the western neighbourhoods, wealthy residents who had taken refuge in Versailles began to return. Paul Martine described them as they followed safely behind the columns of troops, 'as in Africa, where the hyena and the jackal follow the caravans'. One returned denizen bragged about the unlikely exploit of having killed fourteen people who were not his tenants whom he found in his building.¹⁸

Gustave des E. had remained in Paris and was relieved when his servant told him that she had seen that a tricolour flag had replaced the red flag flying on the Arc de Triomphe. The Communards still managed to annoy him, however, interrupting his sleep and confining him to his apartment. Soon Versaillais troops could be seen on the roof of a house at the corner of the boulevard Haussmann and rue Auber, across the street from the Printemps department store. National guardsmen were firing at that building and Communards were hurriedly putting up a barricade across Gustave's very street at night while he tried to sleep. Gustave could

not leave his apartment to go to his club. Out of caution, he slept on the floor. After lunching on a cutlet, ham and potatoes, he took a nap, at least until a shell struck the roof of his building. He sent his servant to the roof to pick up a piece to show him. The nearby barricade below on rue Auber fell and sixty Communards were executed on the spot. A Versaillais lieutenant was killed, and so were eight national guardsmen, whom Gustave had seen below the previous evening. Gustave was never in any danger, despite all the noise. He even dared open the windows to look outside.¹⁹

Speaking from a window at the Hôtel de Ville on Monday, Jules Vallès tried to whip up the defensive effort, greeted by confident applause. Down below, women dressed in black with black crepe tied around their arms and red cockades in their hats went off to help the wounded. Children filled cloth sacks with dirt for barricades and loaded rifles. National Guard officers dashed here and there, and men suddenly left café tables to head towards the battle. A woman rushed up to a youth who lagged behind and berated him, 'Well, and you, are you not going to get yourself killed with the others?'²⁰ By now the Communards had fallen back to the Church of the Madeleine. In the western districts, which the Versaillais had taken, tricolour flags went up.

Versaillais troops now moved along the inside circumference of north-western Paris, as well as beyond the ramparts, preparing an attack on Montmartre. They were already well ensconced on the Champs-Élysées and rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré, and moved rapidly to seize strategic locations and take prisoners on their way to Montmartre. Versaillais troops took the Palais-Royal (which Communards had set on fire to slow down the enemy's advance), place Vendôme, rue de Richelieu and the Bourse. Line troops seized the Bank of France. The Church of Saint-Augustin and Gare Saint-Lazare fell, along with place Saint-Georges, the site of the ruins of Thiers's house. On rue Richelieu next to the Théâtre Français, two ditches were piled with corpses of Communard defenders. When Versaillais troops surrounded the church of Saint-Eustache, 500 *fédérés* inside the church were forced to surrender. The troops didn't bother to take prisoners – the prisoners were executed *en masse*.²¹

On a narrow street behind the Louvre, Englishman Denis Bingham saw a young man shot by 'some infuriated soldiers, who had evidently been drinking deeply'. They then stopped a student, accusing him of being an incendiary and also of trying to poison soldiers. The young man protested his innocence, and was twice put up against a wall and twice wriggled away, 'only to be seized and pulled back again. It was a terrible struggle to witness.' He was finally taken away to a court-martial and probable death.

In the barracks on rue de la Pepinière, near Gare Saint-Lazare, men who had been imprisoned by the Commune because they had refused to fight were shot by the Versaillais, assumed to be deserters. 'What struck me as deplorable in these days', Bingham remembered, 'was the conduct of the population, which, after having shown the most abject submission to the Commune, now clamoured for blood. No sooner was an arrest made than the cry, '*À mort! À mort!*' was raised' by anti-Communards. Bingham, who could not return to his home near the Arc de Triomphe, with bullets flying in every direction, and had taken a room on rue Saint-Lazare, finally found his wife, who had assumed he had been killed.²²

As the Versaillais troops pushed forward, the *fédérés* took to setting fire to buildings to slow down the attack. In some cases the fires were started by Versaillais shells, but, regardless of the cause, houses went up in flames, leaving residents scrambling to find safety. The Cerfbeer family huddled in their apartment on rue Saint-Honoré in great anxiety. Neither news nor provisions were generally to be had, although the family cook had been able to purchase bread. They could not leave, for the *fédérés* were organising resistance right outside their door. Soldiers ordered doors and windows shut. Some residents who went out into the street were sent back in rudely. When an imposing cannon placed below their windows fired from time to time, the entire building shook.

Monday night, an officer knocked on the concierge's door in the building where the Cerfbeer family lived in a neighbourhood that formed a secondary line of defence between the place de la Concorde and the Champs-Élysées. The concierge and his family were Alsations, their strong German accents noticeable to any Parisian. They had two sons. The Communard told them to leave immediately, because the house was to be set on fire: 'No comments. Get out right now!' They gave everybody ten minutes to get out, saying that houses nearby were burning.

Twelve-year-old Gaston Cerfbeer's father told him that their family must leave their home immediately, saying that he would follow once he had gathered up some important papers. Gaston left with the Alsatian concierge, his wife and their two young sons, twelve and fourteen years old. Disoriented people poured into the street. The boy found the faubourg Saint-Honoré 'completely covered by a wall of flames, because its old houses burned like straw – the scene was terrifying, but strangely beautiful'. Gaston, his mother and the concierge's family plunged into the night. A half-destroyed barricade blocked their way, but they managed to get through the corner of rue Richepance, with Gaston pulling one of the

concierge's sons, Fritz, by the hand as they scaled stacked paving stones. Then they heard shots, and Fritz suddenly let go of Gaston's hand and slid to the ground. He was bleeding from the head. His mother cried out as she reached him, but her husband, seeing that nothing could be done, pulled his wife towards the presumed safety of the place Vendôme. Their son was dead.

Further down rue Saint-Honoré, shots came from rue de Castiglione, where the Versaillais troops had just appeared. Seeing a shadow move, they quickly blasted away in its general direction. Gaston stopped, frozen. Risking her life, a domestic servant waved to him from a balcony that they should enter the building, the door of which was half open. He entered the total darkness of the stairway with his mother and the rest of the concierge's family. The only sound heard was the concierge mourning his son's death: '*Mein Fritz! Mein lieber Fritz!*' Someone in the building gave them a candle, as the shooting had stopped. A young girl told them that more fires had been set nearby. Gaston wanted to see for himself, and the two went up to the sixth floor. From the roof they could see 'an immense red inferno, with columns of smoke filling the air with burnt paper'. As the Ministry of Finance burned – set ablaze by Versaillais shells – they could see 'a swarm of black things fleeing rapidly' – rats from the ministry, taking refuge in nearby houses.

The next day uniformed line soldiers dressed in blue and red opened the door telling them it was now safe to leave. Gaston and his family, as well as the concierge and what remained of his relatives, walked quickly towards rue Royale, asking soldiers news of their house. The responses varied. Number 414? Yes, it is burning – no, wait, rather 410 and 414 are ablaze. As everyone could see houses of the faubourg Saint-Honoré aflame, 'a frenzied, irresistible panic took over everyone'. Rumours arrived that the *quartier* had been mined, all ready to be blown up. Luckily, Gaston and his mother found their building intact. His very worried father was waiting for them.

Years later, Gaston could still see the scene, 'the deep rumble of houses collapsing in the middle of cries, falling on unfortunate residents later found burnt or asphyxiated in cellars'. At place de la Concorde, a shell had decapitated the female statue representing the city of Lille. Far more terrifying were real corpses, a pile of them in a corner of the courtyard of Assumption Church, and an even bigger one at the Tuileries Palace, where squads of soldiers were busy killing Communard resisters. A tarpaulin covered the stack of bodies there, as a veritable sea of blood formed around the pile of death. Gaston watched the sad parade of prisoners being taken

along rue de Rivoli and up the boulevards towards the horrors of incarceration at Satory near Versailles.²³

Gaston's experience was by no means unique. Monday had brought the first indication that the Communards might use fire as a means of defence. On rue de Lille in the Seventh Arrondissement, Communards told residents to leave their buildings, saying that fires would be set with petrol. One *fédéré* surmised that fire could provide a means of slowing the advance of Thiers's troops; another retorted that Versaillais shells must have caused the fires that had burst forth.²⁴ Both were reasonable explanations.

On Tuesday, Delescluze and Alfred-Édouard Billioray signed an order: 'Blow up or set fire to the houses which may interfere with your system of defence. The barricades should not be liable to attack from the houses.' The Commune threatened to burn any house from which shots against them were fired by allies of Versailles. When they were about to be overrun, Communard resisters tried to create space between them and the attackers by setting strategically standing houses ablaze. Fires were also set in vengeance, punishing traitors. Those setting fires warned residents in advance. Other conflagrations can be seen as a means of appropriating and purifying contested space. A commander of the National Guard wanted to torch the Imprimerie nationale: 'Here is the house of Badignet [Napoleon III]: we have orders to burn it down.'²⁵

The Versaillais soon believed that the journalist and deputy Jean-Baptiste Millière commanded a force of 150 tasked with setting fire to houses and monuments on the Left Bank. This was absolutely false. Pierre Vésinier, a member of the International as well as of the Commune, supposedly organised a band of fifty incendiaries assigned to burn houses on the boulevards from the Church of the Madeleine to the place de la Bastille. A rumour circulated that Communards had shot people on rue de Lille who attempted to put out the fires. Panic spread in the *beaux quartiers* as buildings went up in flames – including one on rue Saint-Honoré that may have killed seven residents – and the rumours of an organised plot by female incendiaries (*pétroleuses*) swept the city. *La Patrie* reported that Versaillais soldiers found the charred remains of a woman in the chic faubourg Saint-Germain, with remnants of clothing impregnated with petrol and what had once been a pipe in her mouth. To those seeking confirmation of a Communard plot to burn Paris it was clear that the pipe had been used to ignite the gasoline.²⁶

During the battles on 22 and 23 May, Joséphine Marchais, a washer-woman originally from Blois, picked up a gun, donned a Tyrolean hat, and shouted, 'You cowardly crew! Go and fight! If I'm killed it will be because

I've done some killing first!' She was arrested as an incendiary. In fact she had worked as a *vivandière* with the battalion Enfants Perdus. Joséphine had carried laundry back that guardsmen gave her to wash, and she had carried away the body of her lover, a butcher's apprentice called Jean Guy, after he was killed. But no one had seen her with any petrol.²⁷

The *Paris Journal* reported that line soldiers took thirteen women to the military post at place Vendôme, most of them young, who had allegedly thrown petrol into basements. Several seconds later, 'a lugubrious detonation indicated that justice had been done'. A woman may have been gunned down because she was seen too close to the Opéra-Comique, which was not set fire to. Another newspaper announced to eager Versaillais readers that a woman had been arrested with 134 metres of fuse line in her pocket. (This must have been an enormous pocket!) Marie-Jeanne Moussu, a laundress from Haute-Marne married to a man named Gourier, seemed to the Versaillais 'the most perfect example imaginable of these vile creatures of the faubourgs, who provide the Commune with powerful auxiliaries to burn down Paris'. She had indeed set a fire, but was trying to burn out her former lover – her act had nothing to do with the Commune.²⁸

Leighton believed a rumour that *pétroleuses* were paid 10 francs per house that they sent up in flames. According to him, the *pétroleuse* 'walks with a rapid step, near the shadow of the wall; she is poorly dressed; her age is between forty and fifty; her forehead is bound with a red check handkerchief, from which hang meshes of uncombed hair. The face is red and the eyes blurred . . . Her right hand is in her pocket, or in the bosom of her half-unbuttoned dress; in the other hand she holds one of the high, narrow tin cans in which milk is carried in Paris, but which now . . . contains the dreadful petroleum liquid.' He heard that one had been caught in the act in rue Truffault, and fired six shots with a pistol at the Versaillais before being killed. 'Another was seen falling in a doorway of a house in rue de Boulogne . . . a young girl; a bottle filled with petroleum fell from her hand as she dropped.'

US Ambassador Washburne believed the rumours, too, and gave the astonishing figure that 8,000 incendiaries had been at work in Paris, adding that 'of all this army of burners, the women were the worst'. Children, it seemed, were equally culpable. He related that an employee of his Legation had counted the bodies of eight children, the eldest not yet fourteen years of age, shot after being caught with petroleum.²⁹

One rumour claimed a household search on rue des Vinaigriers had turned up thirty small containers ('*oeufs à pétrole*') filled with nitroglycerine.

Woe – and thus death – to women found carrying bottles with anything that looked suspicious, or oil for heating. *Le Siècle* reported that on 31 May a woman ‘was practically cut into pieces’ because she had purchased olive oil. Among women accused of being *pétroleuses* was a twenty-year-old carrying her baby. An officer ordered her to be shot on the spot. Asked what to do with the baby, he supposedly barked, ‘Shoot it too, so that the very seed disappears!’ Denunciations for incendiarism flowed more freely than water to put out the fires.³⁰

It is without question that Communards set some of the fires. Like barricades, fires both served as a means of defence and represented an appropriation of space on behalf of the Commune cause. There is clear evidence that Communards started fires in houses on rue Royale and rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré, trying to create a ‘barrier of flames’ that would slow down the onslaught and eliminate the possibility that Versaillais troops could climb to the upper reaches of the buildings and fire down on barricade defenders.³¹

As the Versaillais advanced and killed, Commune leaders ordered the burning of a number of monumental Parisian buildings, all in the fancy parts of town. Émile Eudes ordered the burning of the Palace of the Conseil d’État and the Committee of Public Safety the Palais-Royal. Théophile Ferré signed the order (subsequently found in the pocket of a Commune who fought at a barricade on rue Royale, dated ‘4 prairial an ’79’) to burn the Ministry of Finance. Courbet remained at the Louvre to try to protect its invaluable collections, but fire broke out or was set on a roof. Paintings and sculptures still in the great museum were saved when passers-by extinguished the conflagration. General Paul-Antoine Brunel ordered fire set to the Naval Ministry next to Gaillard’s giant barricade on place de la Concorde to prevent Versaillais troops from taking it and shooting down on defenders, but the fire did not catch.³²

Could Communards in defeat actually intend to burn down their own city? The Versaillais siege had pushed the Communards to despair and intense anger. Some among them could imagine the entire destruction of Paris – anything was better than ceding it to Thiers. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray insisted that it was better to burn down ‘our houses rather than to turn them over to the enemy’. And Louise Michel did warn that ‘Paris will be ours or cease to exist.’ However, she went no further than insisting that Communards defend Paris ‘until death’. After finishing his meal on the Terrace of the Louvre on Tuesday, Commune General Jean Bergeret ordered the Tuileries Palace set ablaze. Watching the conflagration consume the palace where Napoleon III and his entourage had romped,

Gustave Lefrançais admitted that he was one of those 'who had shutters of joy seeing that sinister palace go up in flames'. Two days later, seeing fires in the distance a Montmartre woman asked Nathalie Le Mel what was burning. Le Mel replied, 'it's nothing at all', only the Palais-Royal and the Tuileries, 'because we do not want a king any more'.

The fires that raged throughout Paris became yet another source of anti-Communard hatred. The burning of the Tuileries, a symbol of the Second Empire, particularly intensified demands from anti-Communards that prisoners be immediately shot, as they shouted '*pas de quartier!* Death to the burners!'³³ The writer Louis Énault accused the Communards of wanting to burn Paris to the ground. They began, in his view, with several *beaux quartiers*, such as rue de Lille, 'a sumptuous and aristocratic residence', with the same cachet as nearby boulevard Saint-Germain. From a window afar, Énault marvelled at the horror of it all, as the fires were pushed along by the evening wind, the flames gathering force 'with a violent speed . . . the fire took on . . . fantastic tones . . . blue, greenish, violet, deep red'. As some Parisians watched the fires spreading in the distance, they wondered which *quartier*, which monuments, which buildings were up in flames. Théophile Gautier believed he was seeing a modern Pompeii. It was as if the destruction begun under Haussmann had continued. The explosion of an occasional shell fired by the Communards from Montmartre added to the fear.³⁴

Walking from the Church of the Madeleine to the place du Château d'Eau (now place de la République), Reclus encountered so few people that it might have been 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the morning, not the middle of the day. Yet at Porte Saint-Martin ordinary people formed a human chain to move paving stones to a barricade, while others stopped passers-by with cries of '*Citoyen, Citoyenne*, to work!' Children of all ages were actively involved in building barricades, two or three struggling together to carry heavy blocks of stone. Reclus had to show his *laissez-passer* at each barricade. Even after carrying stones – despite his handicapped right hand, mangled in a childhood fall – he was briefly stopped at rue Lafayette by a national guardsman who accused him of concealing his Versaillais spying activities by helping out. Reclus remained calm and a police official ordered him freed.³⁵

Reclus did not return home that night, fearing capture. He stayed with friends who lived in faubourg du Temple. 'We are', he assessed, 'like sailors whose ship is taking on water during a storm and which every quarter of an hour sinks a bit further down. Leaning against the front of the ship, we

can see the against the horizon vast waves pounding towards us, howling and frothing in rage.' Would the first big wave that came carry them away, or would it be the second, or perhaps the fourth 'in this stormy sea that is Paris?' Perhaps it would be that very day that 'we would die . . . perhaps tomorrow . . . or perhaps the day after that . . . No matter, it will not have been in vain!'³⁶

From Versailles Thiers proclaimed: 'We are *honnêtes gens* . . . The punishment will be exemplary, but it will take place within the law, in the name of the laws.' This was already clearly not the case, as Versaillais troops were already gunning down Communards right and left. The term '*honnêtes gens*' was loaded with class connotations that had turned murderous. Many among the *honnêtes gens* were delighted to see Paris purged of lower-class insurgents who seemed intent on overturning social hierarchy and privilege.³⁷

As Versaillais troops moved through Paris, they killed, shooting down Communards because they had been taught to despise them. Moreover, in a civil war, enemies could be almost anyone, anywhere. The effect of such summary executions probably in some cases stiffened resistance, but over the following days also served to demoralise resisters. Few could have had any doubt at this point about what was occurring in the streets of Paris and what the eventual outcome of the struggle would be.

When the Versaillais encountered resistance in narrow streets, fired upon from windows of houses, brutal searches and executions followed. Line troops had to be on constant alert, constantly checking windows on the upper floors of houses for Communard snipers. With fighting nearby, a woman living on the elegant rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré had a chimney-sweep come to work. When he left the building, he was seized by troops because his hands and face covered with soot, taken to be gunpowder, and immediately shot, as the woman looked from her window above. The soldiers did not bother to take the time to consider what was a perfectly plausible explanation.³⁸

Fear probably made the soldiers more ruthless. The Versaillais often killed Communard insurgents they discovered, regardless of whether the fighters put up any resistance. On rue Saint-Honoré, line soldiers found thirty national guardsmen hiding in a printing shop. They had thrown away their weapons and hurriedly put on work clothes, but that would not save them. The soldiers took them to rue Saint-Florentin and shot them in the enormous ditch in front of what was left of the barricade. Nearby on rue Royal, troops came upon six men and a young woman in National Guard uniforms hiding in barrels. They were thrown into a ditch and

killed. Volunteers de la Seine shot fifteen men and a woman at Parc Monceau.³⁹ When line troops reached place Vendôme, the fallen column further stoked reprisals against Communards who had surrendered or been captured; Versaillais shot at least thirty people there.⁴⁰

Édouard Manet's lithograph *Civil War* evokes the horror of death at the Church of the Madeleine, where the Versaillais gunned down about 300 Communards who had taken refuge in the church. No insurgent escaped. At first glance, *Civil War* would lead one to think that Manet was depicting the tragedy of civil war in a general, neutral way. However, the dead man is clearly wearing a National Guard uniform and is clutching a piece of white cloth, suggesting that he and others had been trying to surrender; the Madeleine appears unmistakably in the background. Manet's *The Barricade*, another gripping indictment of the repression during Bloody Week, depicts a firing squad killing Communards.⁴¹

The killing went on, supported in no small part by Parisians who welcomed Versaillais troops. Forbes, for one, was appalled by the 'Communard hunting' of Versaillais soldiers, aided by some people whom he suspected had earlier shouted for the Commune and now denounced *fédérés*. Concierges eagerly informed soldiers where Communards might be hiding: 'They knew the rat-holes into which the poor creatures had squeezed themselves, and they guided the Versaillist soldiers to the spot with a fiendish glee.'

Versaillais troops seized on any evidence they could find of insurgency. Three women were gunned down because the Versaillais came across several pairs of National Guardsman's trousers in their apartment. A furrier on rue des Martyrs allegedly was summarily executed because he had invited Pyat to his apartment six months earlier. When the man's wife protested, she was also killed. On place du Trône (now Nation), soldiers saw light in an upper apartment and went up to find two elderly men drinking tea. They were shot for no reason, despite the pleas of their concierge that they had had nothing to do with the *fédérés*. Social class did them in. The Versaillais paid no mind to the fact that some of the Communards they were gunning down had a few months earlier fought for France against the Prussians and their German allies.⁴²

The Communards began frantically to organise resistance in the Sixth Arrondissement. On Tuesday Jean Allemane helped organise the defence of rues Vavin and Bréa, just below boulevard Montparnasse, thus joining defences at place de l'Observatoire, protecting the Jardins du Luxembourg. Not far away, Eugène Varlin readied defenders at the small place du Croix-Rouge. The task was imposing, with Cisse's huge army of three

divisions attacking only three battalions of National Guardsmen. When orders came from Commune leaders that they should fall back to defend their own *quartiers*, the defence of the Left Bank became impossible. Two battalions of national guardsmen from the Eleventh and Twelfth Arrondissements refused to obey Allemane and crossed the Seine to their own neighbourhoods, saying that if they were going to die fighting, they preferred to do so in their own *quartiers*.⁴³

Communards continued to fall. An English doctor helping wounded Communards recalled: 'We took in only the worst cases on 21, 22, 23 May. Our garden, court, corridors and floor were crowded with wounded brought in fresh from the fight . . . Many did not make it.'⁴⁴

Many of the barricades on the Left Bank had been built within a day, after the first line troops had entered Paris. They did not survive Versaillais attacks on Tuesday. A barricade on rue de Rennes, below Gare Montparnasse, was the largest, but no more than thirty men were there to defend it. Yet Communard cannons firing behind sizable barricades still inflicted casualties on the attackers. Barricades fell at Croix-Rouge and rue du Dragon. The *quartier* was ablaze, and the barricades at rue de Rennes fell on Tuesday, with their defenders, including the Enfants du Père Duchêne, who fell back along boulevard Saint-Germain. A Versaillais officer believed they were executing more men than had fought behind barricades.⁴⁵

Allemane and others sought to impose some order on the defences at rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs and boulevard Saint-Michel, but it did not help that, now that the fight seemed all but lost, guardsmen cared only about protecting their own neighbourhoods. Versaillais troops surrounded remaining barricades and fired down on them from adjacent buildings. Calls for reinforcements brought no response. Smoke rising from the Hôtel de Ville and other important buildings further demoralised remaining Communard fighters.⁴⁶

At this point, forced to acknowledge that there was little hope of victory, most Communards began to prepare themselves for the end. As the battle drew nearer to the Latin Quarter, Maxime Vuillaume went to his apartment on rue du Sommerard to burn papers that, if seized by the Versaillais, would surely mean big trouble. He had copies of the letter Archbishop Darboy had written to Thiers on 12 April and another to Vicaire Lagarde on the same day – these he gave to Benjamin Flotte, who lived nearby. They went together to have a drink chez Glaser, which they found totally empty. After that brief meeting, Vuillaume never saw Flotte again.⁴⁷

Jean Allemane, like so many other Communards, also now had few illusions about what lay ahead. He pulled everything out of his pockets: a pocket-knife, sixty centimes, some papers, and a card indicating that he worked for the *Journal Officiel*. He began to try to imagine how he would die. Walking towards boulevard Saint-Germain, he ran into a friend called Treilhard, who was going home to put the accounts of Assistance Publique (Welfare Assistance) in order, as he had promised. Allemane advised him that he should go with him to the Eleventh Arrondissement, where the remaining Communards intended to hold their ground, and that, if he did not, Treilhard risked being captured and shot. Treilhard declined, was soon after arrested, put up against a wall, and gunned down.

Allemane managed to get down boulevard Saint-Germain, where various undercover Versaillais policemen were making arrests. One stopped him on the *quai* and asked what he was doing out at 1.00 a.m. Allemane replied that he was going to boulevard de l'Hôpital to check on his aged parents. He got through but passed a young boy, Georges Arnaud, he knew from the neighbourhood being marched along by soldiers. The boy did not give him away by nodding, which could well have cost him his life. A neighbour who ran the bistro Au Chinois told a Versaillais officer that he knew the boy very well and he did not fight and he was released (but later to die of tuberculosis aged twenty-four). Georges's parents took Allemane in. From their apartment they could hear the sound of line troops searching the building. Allemane barricaded the door of the room where he was hiding, preparing to defend himself, but the soldiers were looking for someone else. He resolved to leave and take his chances so as not to jeopardise his rescuers.

After a quick dinner, Allemane headed for the apartment of his brother who lived in the Twentieth Arrondissement. But not long after arriving at rue Levert, police and troops surrounded the building and arrested him. He had no money and no papers that could get him out of Paris. Moreover, 'denunciations rained down on Paris . . . where the police spy was king'. After giving his name as Monsieur Roger, the next day he admitted that he was Jean Allemane. There had been little chance of escaping arrest. He was soon imprisoned in Versailles.⁴⁸

The Army of Versailles and the Volunteers of the Seine had in little more than two days taken more than half of Paris. The only hope now seemed to be for Communard fighters to fall back to their neighbourhoods in eastern Paris and organise the defence of the '*quartiers populaires*'.⁴⁹ A sergeant in the National Guard, who might have got out, related: 'I can't

leave, because what would my comrades from the *quartier* say?⁵⁰ For the Communards, neighbourhood solidarity became even more essential to survival. The defence of Paris withered into the defence of *quartiers*. The role of women became even more important. One of the strange things about the conflict was that, in the street fighting, 'you were sometimes certainly surprised to come upon a childhood friend' fighting for the Versailles.⁵¹

Montmartre, where the Commune had begun little more than two months earlier, remained potentially the strongest point of defence. The Commune sent General Napoléon La Cécilia there. Of 'sad and solemn appearance, without charm, with a cold and proper air', La Cécilia's abilities were far below what was required and he had difficulty communicating because he was Corsican and did not speak French well. The task before him was daunting. La Cécilia found defences on Montmartre disorganised and National Guard battalions demoralised. Communard fighters instinctively resisted his authority because he was virtually unknown in the Eighteenth Arrondissement. But, more importantly, it was too late for anyone, even the most savvy general, to make any difference. Some of the barricades that had gone up on 18 March were still there, and while they could provide some resistance to attacks from the south they could not help if the Versailles attacked from other directions. By 5.00 a.m. on 23 May line troops had reached Porte de Clignancourt, to the north beyond the Butte, a distance of about three kilometres from Batignolles in the Seventeenth Arrondissement.⁵²

Louis Barron agonised over the state of the defences in Montmartre: 'The Mont-Aventin [one of the hills of Rome] is so poorly defended! Spies of Monsieur Thiers, your task will be easy . . . no moats, no trenches, no dry walls at the approaches to this position, whose strength has been exaggerated, because indeed it could have been made formidable.' Barron had a premonition of 'the coming horrible carnage, furious massacres, uncontrolled shooting; I smell the insipid, nauseating odour of streams of blood, saturating the pavement, flowing in the streets'. Yet somehow – at least in People's Paris – the illusion of the invincibility of the popular will persisted.⁵³

La Cécilia wanted to know why the cannons on Montmartre were silent. He found eighty-five cannons and about twenty *mitrailleuses* just sitting there, unattended and unused for two months. Finally, under La Cécilia's direction, the cannons fired several shells, but some of the guns then slid back into the mud, to the extent that they were unusable. Reclus reflected on the irony that when Communard shells finally were launched

from the heights of Montmartre, Belleville and Ménilmontant, they fell on 'the rich and commercial neighbourhoods' of western Paris, where nonetheless many good republicans were still to be found, neighbourhoods that had already suffered Versaillais shelling.⁵⁴

Knowing that line troops had swept so easily through Batignolles and having insufficient numbers of national guardsmen to organise a stout defence, Polish General Jaroslaw Dombrowski now realised that there was no hope. He tried to get out of Paris, but was stopped at Porte Saint-Ouen by *fédérés*. He was then taken to the Hôtel de Ville, where the Committee of Public Safety expressed confidence in him and refused to accept his resignation. Still loyal to the Commune and having nowhere to go, Dombrowski returned to service, just like that. Despite the increasingly desperate situation, Pyat's *Le Vengeur* kept reassuring its readers that all was well although *Père Duchêne* published its last issue that day, carrying the date '3 Prairial, an 79', 23 May 1871.⁵⁵

That day the Army of Versailles launched its assault on Montmartre early Tuesday. Armies attacked from three directions. The army commanded by Clinchant had easily moved through Batignolles, left virtually undefended despite the best efforts of Benoît Malon. Troops killed indiscriminately along the way. A Versaillais officer apparently ordered a soldier who refused to gun down women and children to be shot. Not far away, troops allegedly killed a man who had done absolutely nothing, shot his wife and child when they hugged him too long, and then finished off, for good measure, a doctor who tried to help the child.⁵⁶

With rifle fire from the Butte passing well over their heads, no cannon fire to fear, and only a single *mitrailleuse* to be avoided, the Volunteers of the Seine reached Montmartre. They encountered a defended barricade on rue Marcadet on the far side of the Butte, but were protected by the curve of the street. Soldiers were sent into houses on both sides of the street to fire down on the defenders. Two cannons were brought up to shell the barricade. The fire of the *fédérés* soon weakened, and then the Communard defenders abandoned it. Albert Hans was amazed to find Montmartre, traditional hotbed of radicalism, defended with so little organisation, personnel, or energy. The Volunteers of the Seine reached two barricades at rue des Abbesses and took both quickly, along with 600 prisoners.

Another Communard barricade awaited the Volunteers of the Seine, also on rue Marcadet. They first occupied houses on both sides of the street, mounted the stairs, and from windows above fired down on the defenders. Soon there were only four *fédérés* left at the barricade. They fell almost immediately. Commander Gustave Durieu, 'with his savage energy',

as Hans described him with admiration, personally killed ten men found in nearby buildings. The 'cruel expressions' and 'truly strange and fearsome look' of Durieu, who had honed his skills against rebels in Mexico, were unmistakable. The Volunteers of the Seine began searching houses before regular troops, shooting dead anyone they found wearing a National Guard uniform and carrying a rifle, or who had traces of powder on the palm of a hand. Later the same day, gravely wounded on the Butte of Montmartre, Durieu was carried to the house on rue Rosiers next to where Generals Lecomte and Thomas had been put up against a wall on 18 March. He died the next day. The officer who replaced him ordered more killings. Leighton remembered that, on that hot day, 'all the young men who were found in the streets were provisionally put under arrest, for they feared everyone, even children, and horrible vengeance and thirst for blood had seized upon all. Suddenly an isolated shot would be heard, followed a minute or two after by five or six others. One knew reprisal had been done.'⁵⁷

In the courtyard of a building, the Marquis de Compiègne of the Volunteers of the Seine came upon a horse, which he believed must have belonged to an insurgent. As he considered how to find its owner, he suddenly found himself assailed by several angry women, young and old, crying and shouting, 'my father, my son!' Several Volunteers of the Seine appeared, carrying in a young man about seventeen years old wearing a National Guard uniform, 'more dead than alive': 'He gave the appearance of a sheep with such a stupid aspect that it seemed impossible to believe that he could commit any malicious act.' The marquis took pity, pushing him into a small room. Each time a soldier came in, the marquis told him that he had already searched the room and had found nothing suspect. Presumably the young man survived. Others were not so lucky. The marquis took to his commanding officer, Escolan de Grandpré, a prisoner wearing a sailor's uniform. Grandpré told the captured man that he had dishonoured his uniform and blew out his brains on the spot. On rue Marcadet, the marquis recalled, 'the streams . . . ran with blood as in a street next to the slaughterhouses'.⁵⁸

On the western side of Montmartre, General Clinchant attacked via avenue Clichy, avenue de Saint-Ouen and the cemetery. General Paul de Ladmirault's troops moved along rue Blanche and rue Pigalle, south-west of the butte. The attack from the north faced little resistance, which the Versailles commanders had already anticipated thanks to their spies.⁵⁹ The Versailles finally took the massive barricade at place Clichy on that Tuesday and would control all of Montmartre by the end of the day.⁶⁰

In the meantime, Nathalie Le Mel planted a red flag on the barricade at place Blanche beneath the Butte. She and perhaps as many as 120 other Communards offered stiff resistance. In the fighting in Montmartre, those defending barricades had little in the way of reinforcements, munitions, or food. The barricade at place Blanche fell to General Paul de Ladmirault's troops before noon. Some defenders who had survived the fighting were immediately shot. Others managed to retreat to the barricade at place Pigalle. Sebastien Commissaire saw a company of women hurry into combat. As they approached place Pigalle, 'all of those who were part of this little troop were killed or taken prisoner. From my window, I saw several of the women, whom I had seen go down the street with their arms a few moments earlier, marched back up it, disarmed and surrounded by soldiers.' Line troops took a Communard to a Versaillais officer. The latter asked the man who he was, and he replied, 'Lévêque, mason, member of the Central Committee!' The officer shot him point blank in the face with his pistol.⁶¹ The barricades at place Pigalle held on for three hours of brutal combat, but no more. A few other Communard fighters managed to get to boulevard Magenta. Others fell back on Belleville.

Well-known in Montmartre because of her work with the consumer cooperative La Marmite, Nathalie Le Mel was older than a group of young women wearing armbands of *ambulancières* and red scarves and carrying rifles who followed her. When a Communard artilleryman was wounded, Le Mel and two other women forced open the door of a pharmacy on boulevard de Clichy. She went to a concierge in a nearby building to ask for oil so she could care for a wounded woman, but none was to be found. Natalie tried to restore morale, saying 'We are beaten, but not conquered!' as Montmartre had not yet been taken, although Versaillais troops were overrunning it.⁶²

Louise Michel, who had helped care for the wounded, had gone from the Montmartre cemetery where Communards were being killed to the *mairie* to try to find fifty more men for the struggle. Upon her return to one of the barricades, only fifteen were still there fighting. General Dombrowski came upon them on horseback, telling Michel, 'We're lost.' She exclaimed 'No!' They shook hands, before Dombrowski departed. Within hours, he was killed at the barricade on rue Myrha. Dombrowski's last words were 'I am no traitor'. He was buried in his Polish army uniform.⁶³

Marie Holland, wife of Protestant pastor Eugène Bersier, remembered 23 May: 'What night of hell we spent, with cannons and machine guns all

around us.' They awaited their 'saviours' and early that morning heard a shout from outside that the tricolour now graced a barricade further up the street. Bullets whizzed about. Not too long thereafter the religious couple could exclaim, 'God be blessed! Montmartre is taken!' Returning to their house, which had been occupied by Communards, they found all in order and a note: 'Dear Pastor, may God protect your house, where we were!' All signs indicated that the temporary occupants had to leave quickly. The couple wondered where they were now – fighting somewhere, or perhaps already dead. The next day, Pastor Bersier came upon more than sixty bodies of national guardsmen. He wanted to copy down their names so he could attempt to notify their families, but line troops would not have it. He became angry when he saw people yelling at troops escorting prisoners 'Kill them, sabre them, without pity, my boys!'⁶⁴

The young Montmartre resident Sutter-Laumann, who had gone to work at the *mairie* of the Eighteenth Arrondissement the day before, was among those drawing fire near place Clichy. He quickly noticed that a good many guardsmen had exchanged their uniforms for civilian clothes in a last-ditch effort to avoid capture and certain death. A barricade at rue Lepic had only about a dozen defenders, and another further up the street only five or six. Resisters seemed either old or very young, with few in between. Twenty women marched towards rue Lepic behind a red flag. However, the guns at Moulin de galette were again quiet, thus offering Communard fighters no encouragement. After an exchange of gunfire between the defenders of the larger barricade further down rue Lepic, the Versaillais swept into nearby buildings and fired from above. Within a few minutes, about half the guardsmen and women had been killed or wounded.

Sutter-Laumann managed to escape the Versaillais attack, moving quickly from place Clichy via rue Véron to reach a barricade further up rue Lepic. The Communard cannons there had no shells. There were still five or six *fédérés* in position, but they soon retreated. The young Communard went to place Saint Pierre, where Versaillais shells were falling. He learned that line troops had taken boulevard Ornano and that place du Château d'eau was completely surrounded, ravaged by a 'cyclone' of shells. From rue Tholozé Sutter-Laumann could see troops in red trousers below at Moulin de galette. Shouts here and there of 'Long live the Commune!' and 'The Versaillais are cowards!' were not going to be enough. Now came time to think about getting out. At the home of a friend he carefully cleaned his National Guard uniform and waxed his shoes, in the hope of eliminating any trace of combat.⁶⁵

Suddenly shots resounded outside. Hoping against hope, the father of Sutter-Laumann's friend assumed that they had been fired by *fédérés*. But they were not national guardsmen. Almost immediately, Versaillais officers ordered from the street that all widows be shut and one of them demanded to know if there were guardsmen inside. There were eleven in the cellar, including Sutter-Laumann and his friend. When they emerged from the basement they were confronted by the rifles of line troops. An officer barked, 'Did you serve the Commune?' 'No, my lieutenant', came the reply. 'Then why are you wearing a National Guard uniform?' Sutter-Laumann's response came quickly. He was so dressed because if he had gone out without a uniform that morning he would have risked arrest. Then why had he not gone to Versailles? He told the officer that he was only nineteen years old and lived with his parents. They had not been able to get out of Paris. The interrogator said that he had managed to get to Versailles. Desperate, Sutter-Laumann asked how he could live there with no resources. When the Versaillais replied that his expenses would have been paid, Sutter-Laumann asked hopefully how he could have known that?

Sutter-Laumann made a point of answering the Versaillais officer 'in good French, without the accent of the faubourg', which could have got him shot immediately. Suddenly, nearby volleys could be clearly heard: 'Those are your comrades whom we are shooting.' The young man repressed a shudder. What grade of officer were you? 'None', came the reply. When asked the same question, his friend Alcide admitted that he had been a sergeant. The officer told them to go and get their guns and bring them down, which luckily bore no traces of having been fired. When the officer told them to change their clothes, they replied that they had no others. This brought the officer's loaded pistol to Sutter-Laumann's head. The latter sputtered that they had sold their clothes during the siege.

Sutter-Laumann and his pal Alcide were incredibly lucky. Many others were not. The officer of the Volunteers of the Seine knew that often the Versaillais were not taking prisoners. Summary executions were becoming routine. He rather liked the two young men. The officer suddenly told them that he had lived in the same *quartier* for a long time. He advised them to go home, stay there, and get rid of uniforms and anything – buttons, military decorations of any kind – that suggested a connection with the Commune. The officer assured them that the soldiers who were behind them would not be as understanding. The two young men hurried to the apartment. The other national guardsmen emerged finally from the cellar, as had Sutter-Laumann and Alcide a few moments earlier,

having been fortunate that no search of the building had been undertaken. They too quickly transformed themselves into civilians and may have survived.

Now where to go? Women from the neighbourhood had just found thirty-seven corpses on rue Lepic. Sutter-Laumann, Alcide and his family amounted to ten people in the small apartment. Versaillais troops arrived. They took a look at Sutter-Laumann and the others, and then moved on. Then another group came, these more determined, demanding that all weapons in the building be brought down. But they too went on. Then came more soldiers, searching each apartment. They uncovered one line uniform. But its owner could not be found and they, too, departed. How much longer could this good fortune go on?

The next group of Versaillais line soldiers who entered the courtyard below were drunk, some barely able to stand up for all the wine and eau-de-vie they had knocked down. They smashed empty bottles on the ground. Their officers were also drunk – ‘a redoubtable drunkenness – drunk with blood. Their movements are jerky, nervous. They express themselves violently,’ Sutter-Laumann recalled. Occasionally a woman’s scream could be heard outside, as someone else was being arrested. Night came. Alcide’s dog barked during the long night, to the point that Sutter-Laumann literally tried – and failed – to strangle it, fearing that Versaillais troops might come calling. Putting the animal under a blanket finally kept it quiet.

Early the next morning, Sutter-Laumann persuaded a young woman to go out with what money he had and buy him some more convincing civilian clothes. She was horrified to find bodies strewn about almost everywhere. Sounds of fighting could still be heard, but now further away. The woman returned with a small melon-shaped hat and sewed buttons on to his clothes, eliminating all traces of red trim. He was no longer a national guardsman. Early in the afternoon, a small boy knocked on the door, with a message from Sutter-Laumann’s father telling him that it was more dangerous to hide at this point than to venture out in the street. His father had also been very lucky. After being dissuaded by his wife from fighting at a barricade, he was accosted by a Versaillais while trying to give the impression that he was employed by a wine merchant. From his responses, the soldier took him to be a ‘worthy man’ and was willing to overlook the fact that he had inadvertently worn his military boots to his job at the *mairie* of the Eighteenth Arrondissement.

Extremely fortunate to have survived, Sutter-Laumann went to work at the *mairie*, taking a seat at his usual desk. As always, the room in which he worked was full of women seeking certificates authorising them to

receive additional bread: 'destitution does not take time off'. He could not help noticing men he had never seen before observing everything very carefully. They were police spies, looking for Communards.

As father and son were leaving the *mairie*, their boss ran up to them and revealed a purported plan to shoot all the municipal employees there. 'My poor son,' Laumann's father stuttered, 'I have thrown you into the mouth of the wolf.' A civil delegate of the Versailles government had arrested a worker who slipped into old habits and called him 'citizen'; now the Versaillais delegate wanted them all shot. Terrified, Sutter-Laumann and his father resolved to get to work at 7.00 a.m. to demonstrate their eagerness. They shook hands with those wearing Versaillais uniforms. Each evening for eight days, employees were escorted home by an armed soldier, more to keep them from being arrested and perhaps shot than to prevent escape. Sutter-Laumann managed to get rid of compromising cartridges in his apartment by burning some of the powder and tossing the remainder into a fountain.⁶⁶

In the fighting, confusion was inevitable. A laundress kindly provided onion soup to some Versaillais troops, not realising that her 'guests' were not Communard national guardsmen. Uniforms contributed to such errors. On one occasion Hans and other Volunteers of the Seine entered a house from which they believed a shot had been fired and came upon a Communard in the process of changing out of a cavalryman's uniform into workmen's clothes. Assuming that his visitors were national guardsmen, he explained that he was disguising himself in order to get closer to fire at the soldiers of Versailles. He was shot as a deserter. A woman in Montmartre heard someone pounding on her door. She found in the hallway several uniformed men, who asked where her husband could be found. The woman replied that her husband was sleeping, for he had just returned from fighting all night on the barricades. Unfortunately, the armed men were not national guardsmen, but rather Volunteers of the Seine. They hauled her husband away to an uncertain fate.⁶⁷

The fall of Montmartre, with its reputation for being impregnable, was an enormous blow to Communard morale. The Versaillais were now within range of the *quartiers* below that the cannons on Montmartre could have perhaps protected. Resisters abandoned these central *quartiers*, falling back on the north-eastern neighbourhoods. The way was now open for the Versaillais forces to storm Belleville, where the Communards retained artillery and munitions. But their artillerymen were nowhere to be found.

Line troops and Volunteers of the Seine had taken 2,000 prisoners during the fighting and then through searches that moved systematically from house to house to house. For his part, the Marquis de Compiègne would be happy to see gunned down 'all those who were leaders of the insurrection', which they had so carefully prepared 'with the only goal of satisfying their ambition and their vengeance'. However, the Pyats, Rocheforts and Courbets were not to be found at the barricades. Many Communard leaders simply disappeared into the night.⁶⁸

Raoul Rigault was still in Paris, determined to fight to the end. On Wednesday, he rode to the prison of Sainte-Pélagie to settle a personal score. He went to the cell of Gustave Chaudey, whom he had ordered arrested on 13 April, to tell him that he would be shot immediately. Rigault had never forgiven Chaudey, once his friend, for having ordered guardsmen to fire on demonstrators at the Hôtel de Ville, killing Théophile Sapia, another of Rigault's friends. A firing squad of eight men, commanded by Rigault, shot Chaudey, and then gunned down three gendarmes for good measure.⁶⁹ Rigault then met with other Blanquists at the Prefecture of Police, where he had always felt at home. He proposed the blowing-up of bridges and the organisation of the final resistance on Ile-de-la-Cité, where the hostages would be taken. He now believed defeat inevitable, and that the Commune should end in such a way as to encourage its successors in further revolutions. Rigault began piling police documents into boxes.

What was left of the Communard leadership, now only twenty men or so, met (without Rigault present) at the Hôtel de Ville that evening of 23 May. They knew that Montmartre had fallen and that hope of the Commune's survival was fading with every hour. Charles Delescluze had been there all day, signing proclamations with a shaking hand while hearing nothing but bad news. He had not slept in three days and could hardly talk due to laryngitis. The next day, Commune member Charles Beslay asked him if they should not evacuate women and children from Paris. Delescluze replied that with the streets blocked by barricades and Versaillais troops guarding the western gates, he did not see how they could. Even though all was lost, the final issue of *Le Cri du peuple* that day bravely proclaimed, 'One last effort and victory is ours.'⁷⁰

Sturdy Communard defences did remain in the Thirteenth Arrondissement and on the Right Bank at place de la Bastille, place du Château d'eau, and in the Eleventh Arrondissement, as well as in Belleville and much of the proletarian Twentieth Arrondissement. Thiers's forces advanced rapidly on all fronts, slaughtering as they went.

If down below in Paris Communards were bitterly discouraged, up in Belleville they still held out hope. Reclus walked into Belleville's neo-Gothic church around 10 o'clock that Tuesday morning. A young vicar was teaching the Catechism to boys and girls. He reminded them that Hell awaited 'the ungodly and revolutionaries' and related that in the two months of anarchy in which they were living, the Commune had inflicted on the Church unprecedented persecution. Even in Belleville, churchmen continued to oppose the Commune, as the fighting drew ever closer.

Looking down on Paris from Belleville, Reclus was reminded of the view of Geneva. In glorious sunshine, the city stretched out far beneath his feet, 'a vast rocky plain, rather an immense beehive, in which straw and twigs had replaced bell towers, columns and arcs of triumph'. Below, the 'Party of Order' was at work with cannons, rifles and bayonets.⁷¹

In the Eighteenth Arrondissement, executions continued into Wednesday, even after Montmartre had been taken. On rue Myrha, two Versaillais soldiers followed a man into a house, where he tried to hide. They shot him on the spot. The concierge asked them as they were leaving if they were simply going to leave the body there. When the response was affirmative, he paid them to cart it away. Each took one of the man's legs, bouncing the head off the ground as they took it to a garbage heap. Onlookers applauded. On rue Montmartre, soldiers were looking for a Communard captain. Finding only his twelve-year-old son at home, they killed him. And when a young man reproached them for their act, they shot him as well.⁷²

The Versaillais set up a court-martial in Montmartre that same day at 6, rue de Rosiers, where Generals Thomas and Lecomte had been executed on 18 March. Forty-two men, three women and four children were shot there, some forced to kneel in front of the wall before being executed.⁷³

One resident living near Porte Saint-Denis who supported the Versaillais watched from his window as guardsmen hurriedly reinforced the barricade below and hauled a cannon toward the Church of the Madeleine; they too seemed determined to keep up the defence. Early in the afternoon on Wednesday, a National Guard company appeared. Sentinels who appeared at the intersections of the boulevard Saint-Denis forced passers-by to add a paving stone to the barricade. More *fédérés* appeared, threatening to 'blow the brains out' of anyone who fled. After sleeping badly, the resident went down the next morning to get a closer look. He strolled about, as on an ordinary day, seemingly oblivious to the danger, and calmly asked his neighbour, 'And so! Things are heating up?' He must not have noticed the *fédéré* riding by, his horse carrying the body of a fallen Communard.⁷⁴

Edgar Monteil, a journalist for *Le Rappel* and a National Guardsman, survived the battle and executions, but witnessed first-hand the hatred that enabled the Versaillais to kill so many Communards – men, women and children alike – *en masse*. He and a colleague called Lemay returned to their office to sleep. Soldiers broke through the office door. The Versaillais searched the office, finding only a gun not in service since the Prussian siege, but copies of *Le Rappel* were enough to assure arrest. An officer asked about these new prisoners and was told ‘They are from *Le Rappel*.’ The commander turned towards the journalists: ‘You are the ones who lit the fires of this civil war!’ But for the moment no rifles clicked into readiness. Monteil and Lamy were locked in an old guard post, hungry and thirsty. While hiding compromising documents, Monteil had thought to take along some money. They pounded on the door, asking a guard outside for bread and water. He asked if they had money, and Monteil gave him ten francs. They never saw the bread or water, the guard, or the money.

Monteil and Lemay were taken to Versailles as part of a convoy of 500 prisoners. An officer told them as they passed near the ramparts that Communards were being killed there, but not all of them, for ‘we will make a choice, that’s for sure’. Monteil realised that he certainly had never detested the Versaillais as much as the anti-Communards hated them. In contrast to the Parisian middle classes, the inhabitants of outlying villages seemed sympathetic to the plight of the prisoners. But at the gates of Versailles it started up again: ‘Dirty Parisians!’ yelled a captain, ‘Heap of rabble. You are going to enter the capital of the good, worthy and honest rural people! Take off your hats, vermin, hats off!’ He hit those who refused with the flat of his sword. At place des Armes, the well-dressed hurled mud at the ragged prisoners and a lady struck at them with her cane. Another captain ordered them to salute the palace of kings, raising his sword in warning. When they reached the prison camp of Satory at Versailles, line troops shouted out, ‘Do you see the pepper-mill [*la mitrailleuse*]? . . . Nothing to fear!’⁷⁵

Death Comes for the Archbishop

MONTMARTRE, THE GREAT STRONGHOLD OF THE COMMUNE STANDING TALL above Paris, had fallen on Tuesday 23 May. Wednesday would be another critical day. The task of Thiers's troops now seemed easier. The Committee of Public Safety – a couple of members had already fled the city – now met in permanence in the Hôtel de Ville. The Commune on Wednesday issued a proclamation to the Versaillais troops: 'Do not abandon the cause of the workers! Do as your brothers did on 18 March!' The Committee of Public Safety followed with its own message, hoping against hope that the Commune might still endure: 'Like us, you are proletarians . . . Join us, our brothers!'¹

The Versaillais did not slow down. There would be no repeat of 18 March. Communard fighters readied their weapons. When Paris awoke, the skies were red and black from smoke rising from the Palace of the Legion of Honour, Palais-Royal, and houses on rue Royale – where the clock had stopped at 1.10 p.m. the previous afternoon.² In the Hôtel de Ville, national guardsmen slept where they could, among wounded men resting on bloody mattresses. Two men arrived carrying an officer who had lost most of his face and jaw to a Versaillais shell. Barely audible and clutching the remnants of a red flag, he encouraged his compatriots to keep on fighting. Gabriel Ranvier, a member of the Commune from the Twentieth Arrondissement, ordered two men to return to their *arrondissements* and lead the fight, threatening to have them shot if they failed to do so.

In another upper room, members of the Commune and various military officers, some in civilian clothes, sat around a large table, solemnly discussing the worsening situation. They had been meeting all night, and must have been exhausted. During the course of their deliberations, they

ordered the execution of a Versaillais spy, whose body was tossed into the Seine. As Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray observed, hope was gone but courage still remained. Charles Delescluze was there, determined, but he gave the impression of a defeated man, going through the motions as he awaited the final act. In a room near the entrance to the Hôtel de Ville lay the body of the Polish General Jaroslaw Dombrowski. The murderous thunder of cannons crept in from outside.³

A proclamation of the Committee of Public Safety tried to reassure the population. Despite the fact that, thanks to 'treachery', Versaillais forces had occupied some of Paris, such setbacks should not 'dishearten you but rather spur you to action'. Parisians should build more barricades to make Paris 'impregnable'. But it was certainly too late for that. The absence of centralised planning for the defence of the capital was even more sadly apparent. The Central Committee appealed also to the soldiers of Versailles, urging them not to fight for 'military despotism', that disobedience was 'a duty', and asking them to 'fraternise' with the people.⁴

That same day, Adolphe Thiers, fearing a hostile reaction in other parts of France to all the summary executions, sent out a telegram to the prefectures of the provinces announcing that Marshal Patrice de MacMahon had warned the Communards to surrender or risk being shot. In fact, no such notice to Paris had gone out. Thiers and his government wanted nothing less than the execution of as many insurgent Parisians as possible. The president of the provisional government assured the National Assembly that 'Our valiant soldiers conduct themselves in such a manner as to inspire foreign countries with the highest esteem and admiration.'⁵ At the time the members of the National Assembly may not have been unaware of the extent of the summary executions. But most of them certainly did not care.

At 9.00 a.m. the Commune's War Delegation issued an order, dated '4 prairial an 79', for the destruction of any house from which shots were fired on national guardsmen, and the execution of everyone in the building if they did not immediately hand over the 'authors of the crime'. As the Versaillais advanced even deeper into the city, the National Guard insisted that windows be closed because some Communard soldiers had 'treacherously' been shot from such places.⁶

Even though Montmartre had fallen, the fighting continued and casualties mounted. On 24 May, early in the morning, Albert Hans's battalion went down the hill from Montmartre towards Porte Clignancourt, where barricades had also fallen the day before. Then, turning in the direction of Gare du Nord on the chaussée Clignancourt, they came upon the bodies of

a dozen Versaillais troops. They also came upon weapons hastily abandoned by Parisians, including some of the cannons seized by the population at place Wagram on 18 March, which now seemed like an eternity ago. A tricolour now floated above the Moulin de la Galette. At rue Rochechouart, bullets were still flying, fired from the barricades at the corner of rue du faubourg Poissonnière, boulevard d'Ornano and boulevard Magenta. These positions, too, soon fell. In the confusion, Hans and other Volunteers of the Seine found themselves fired on by regular Versaillais troops, before they could identify themselves.⁷

A guardsman came to the door of the apartment where Élie Reclus was staying, asking the friend hosting him to 'take a position at the barricade being constructed nearby'. Reclus's friend replied that he was over forty and therefore exonerated from National Guard service, which the guardsman accepted, returning to the barricade below. He had not addressed a word to Reclus, who was in the next room with the door open. Suddenly, an explosion like thunder, all too close, enveloped everything in a huge white cloud of smoke. Communard fighters had blown up the munitions storage facility in the Jardins du Luxembourg in order to slow the Versaillais advance. From their window Reclus and his friend could see fires burning in the distance. Soon after, line troops swept through nearby barricades, leaving nothing but rubble. Reclus would not forget the scene: 'Victorious, the tricolour flag was hoisted above a pile of cadavers, in a sea of blood.'⁸

Reclus reflected on the hopelessness of the situation. Paris was powerless before an army of 130,000 men with 500 cannons, a giant 'horde of Bonapartists, clergy, Orléanists and conservatives', intent on destroying the democratic and social Republic. Poorly organised and without effective leaders, the Communards were 'floating like the unfortunate jellyfish left aground by the ravages of a storm, our willpower is useless, our efforts in vain, our hope has become ridiculous . . . our little lives are engulfed by these incredible events'. All night one could hear the 'horrifying clamour of the painful tocsin rung in Belleville and Ménilmontant, falling still, and then taking up again, followed by the desperate roll of the drums calling everyone to combat'.⁹

Not all Parisians noticed the bloodshed. While the fighting moved eastward through Paris, Gustave des E. slept. He bravely ventured out, 'after a nice lunch', of course, to go to his club, avoiding the smouldering rue Royale, where, as described by Théophile Gautier, fire had 'continued the work of the cannon fire and shells. Gutted houses reveal their insides like gutted bodies.' Twelve members had somehow managed to get to the club, so Gustave did not have to dine alone.¹⁰

Georges Jeanneret watched the Versaillais tide sweep through Communard defences: 'While the battle continues in Paris and its faubourgs, bourgeois Paris celebrates its triumph in its sumptuous neighbourhoods.' It was impossible to ignore that this was very much a class war. The weather was beautiful. Well-dressed ladies, some carrying parasols 'in order to protect their complexions from the bright sunshine . . . approach the corpses which were lying about, and with the tips of their parasols deliberately remove the caps or clothing placed over the faces of the dead'. One woman stepped up and chided one of them: 'Madame, death should be respected.'¹¹

Maxime Vuillaume knew full well that the end was near and that he needed to destroy any evidence that tied him to the Communards. He tore up a ticket to the toppling of the Vendôme Column and, even more compromising, an identity card given him by the Commune detailing his name, address and profession: journalist. He had no illusions: from rue Lacépède in the Fifth Arrondissement he could hear the volleys of executions in the Jardin des Plantes. Crossing place Saint-Michel, a young woman said to him, 'Let's go, citizen, your cobblestone!' Vuillaume obliged, putting a large stone on the barricade intended to block the entry to the *quai* and the Pont-au-Change. At 11.30 a.m., the barricade was more or less ready, but where were the guardsmen to defend it? Hoping to get both lunch and news, Vuillaume headed to the restaurant Chez Lapeyrouse along the Seine, where Raoul Rigault often dined with his Communard colleagues from the Prefecture of Police. Five or six tables were taken. Vuillaume lunched with friends. With the bill came the news that the Versaillais were near.

Returning to place Saint-Michel, Vuillaume ran into Rigault, who suggested a drink at the Café d'Harcourt. Rigault told him that the previous evening he had had his old friend Gustave Chaudey shot. Before Vuillaume, shaken by the news, could reply, Rigault was off, saying 'See you in a minute. At the Panthéon!' Vuillaume walked up boulevard Saint-Michel, came upon an *ambulance* next to the gardens, and shook hands with people he knew. No one said a word. On rue Royer-Collard, he ran into Rigolette, who ran the Cochon Fidèle on the corner of rue des Cordiers. There, two Communards stood behind a barricade, ready to fight, in front of the house of one of Vuillaume's former teachers, Joseph Moutier, who had taught Rigault physics. Death was in the air, intensified by the seeming normalcy of walking past the house of someone the two Communards had known and admired.¹²

Julien Poirier's Versaillais infantry unit had taken fifty prisoners without firing a shot, having slept the previous night with troops on the pavement

outside Les Invalides. As they neared the Jardins du Luxembourg, they faced cannon fire and several Versaillais troops were killed. As they made progress, Poirier saw a woman carrying a red flag going into a building and told his captain, who sent men in after her. At the top of the stairs, they found her in the attic, 'armed to the teeth'. Pushing her into the middle of the room, they took turns beating her with the butts of their rifles. Poirier and some of the others then forced her down the stairs, killing her before they reached the ground floor.

Once outside again, they noticed that no more Communard shells were falling. As the powder magazine at the Jardins du Luxembourg exploded, the troops continued to advance, eyeing the buildings on either side, fearing snipers. Arriving at boulevard Saint-Michel, they faced determined opposition and for the moment could not cross one of Paris's main arteries.¹³ Although Baron Georges Haussmann's boulevards helped the Versaillais by allowing them to move quickly into central Paris, they also gave Communard fighters the chance to defend themselves with cannon fire, slowing the onslaught.

To Edmond de Goncourt, the dark smoke hanging aggressively above his city gave the impression of 'a day of an eclipse'. The acrid smell of gasoline permeated the air. The apocalypse had come to Paris. As clouds of smoke poured into the air, wild stories spread that new and terrible means of destruction were imminent. Baron de Montaut, an agent of Thiers working inside Paris, insisted that Communards had mined the sewers of Paris, which was not true.¹⁴

Versaillais troops encountered pockets of Communard resistance that Wednesday in the Sixth Arrondissement. Line troops overwhelmed the barricade at Carrefour de l'Observatoire above the Jardins du Luxembourg, and soon the neighbourhoods around the Jardins du Luxembourg, Saint-Michel and the Panthéon were besieged. A Communard warning was posted that in, the interest of defending Paris, the Panthéon would be blown up in two hours. Those living in the *quartier* were asked to 'move away a reasonable distance from the area of the explosion'. The neighbourhoods around the Panthéon became a battlefield. Versaillais soldiers drove the Communards out of the Jardins du Luxembourg, attacking the barricade defending rue Soufflot, beneath the Pantheon and the Sorbonne. Communard defenders retreated towards the Seine, leaving behind barricades on rue Royer-Collard and rue Gay-Lussac, which fell when the Versaillais outflanked the resistance by taking side streets. Troops commanded by Cissey moved towards the Panthéon but were stalled when Maxime Lisbonne ordered the munitions storage facility in the gardens destroyed.

Still, the Versaillais had utterly destroyed what little Communard resistance remained. That day about 700 Communards were shot in the vicinity of the Panthéon, including 40 on rue Saint-Jacques. Local Communard officers met for the last time in the *mairie* at place du Panthéon.¹⁵ They rejected a suggestion that they surrender. Surviving Communards headed down the hill and over the Seine to the Eleventh Arrondissement.

Alexander Thompson, a young Englishman, lived with his parents on boulevard Saint-Michel across from the Jardins du Luxembourg, so he witnessed the fighting there first-hand. Two barricades stood before their house, 'under the command of a pretty Amazon whose beauty, charming ways, and always ready revolver convinced each passer-by to lend a hand'. Several hours later, he saw the woman, clutching a rifle, lying dead on the barricade of rue Soufflot. A soldier tore open her clothes with his sword for the amusement of the other troops.¹⁶

Reclus watched the sun set from pont de Bercy behind the Gare de Lyon, 'the green waters flowing slowly and quietly: the beacons, their masts and the arches of the bridges are clearly reflected in their peaceful mirror'. In the distance he could see 'a golden and silver rain of opaline, iridescent pearls, an orange dust, (as) the monuments stand profiled in lightly violet fumes'. A red flag still flew from the top of the Panthéon, but it would soon be replaced by the tricolour. He could hear 'the distant sounds that float in the luminous sky, the song of the trumpet, the whistling of bullets and the crackle of machine guns'.¹⁷

Unfortunately for Raoul Rigault he was near the Panthéon just before it fell. Earlier that day, he had gone to his beloved Prefecture of Police with the ever-faithful Théophile Ferré. Rigault freed the few political suspects and several common criminals still in custody, shouting 'Let's go, bandits, we're going to burn this place down! We don't want to roast you!' A man called Veysset who had been arrested ten days earlier as a presumed spy for Versailles accused of trying to bribe General Jaroslaw Dombrowski was also in a cell there. Seeing him, Rigault turned the man over to Ferré and Georges Pilotell, mediocre artist and Communard policeman, who took him with soldiers from the Vengeurs de Flourens to the statue of Henri IV on the western tip of the Ile-de-la-Cité. There they shot him.¹⁸

Rigault, wearing his uniform as a commander of the 114th battalion of the National Guard, went to the Panthéon, in his old *quartier*, to encourage resistance. One of his friends reminded him that wearing this uniform was not perhaps a good idea, should he be captured. '*Mon vieux*,' he replied,

'better to die like this! This will be useful for the next time!' After the barricade on rue Soufflot fell, Rigault entered a hotel on rue Royer-Collard. He had rented a room there under the name of Auguste Varenne. Now, he perhaps wanted to rest and await his fate. Not far away, several line troops, one a corporal who had seen a guardsman open the door and enter, ran to the hotel and stormed in. They accosted the hotel's owner, a certain Monsieur Chrétien.¹⁹

Rigault, hearing the commotion, ran up the stairs to the sixth floor. The soldiers ordered the hotel owner to go after him and tell him that the soldiers would shoot him – Monsieur Chrétien – if he did not come down. They did not know the man they wanted to capture was Raoul Rigault, who proposed to the hotelier that the two of them make their perilous escape across the rooftops. When Chrétien refused, Rigault replied, 'I am neither an idiot nor a coward. I will go down.' The soldiers were waiting for him on the second floor. They took him in the direction of the Jardins du Luxembourg, where execution squads were at work. Rigault announced to his captors: 'Here I am! It's me! [*Me voilà!*]', surrendering his pistol. Unsure of whom they had captured, they found an officer who asked the prisoner his name. Rigault, a prize catch, identified himself. When he shouted 'Long live the Commune! Down with the murderers!' the soldiers put him up against the wall and shot him dead.

Rigault's body lay on the ground. The so-called 'men of order' who had killed him poked at it with their umbrellas and canes. The artist Georges Pillotel, who admired him, came upon the corpse and sketched it. Finally, Rigolette, who ran the café Cochon Fidèle, brought down an old blanket and covered up Rigault's bloody head.²⁰

Henri Dabot was bourgeois, a moderate republican, and a fervent Catholic. Fighting now swirled around his neighbourhood. Communards were killed at the barricade at rue Cujas above rue Saint-Jacques. Dabot's cook, Marie, tried to hide a boy of about fourteen or fifteen whom soldiers were chasing, believing that he had fired a shot at a captain after the barricade fell at the corner of rue Saint-Jacques and rue des Écoles. The boy, who lived near the church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont next to the Panthéon, was small enough to hide, literally, under the skirts of the cook. The soldiers found him, however, marched him to the Cluny Museum, and shot him in front of it. The boy's friends found his body.

Now that the barricades on rue Saint-Jacques and rue Cujas had fallen, Communards began to retreat from the Fifth Arrondissement. A *fédéré* went from house to house, telling people to run for their lives. On rue

Clovis, a mother replied 'Run! Run where? A hail of bullets everywhere! Leaving here would be the most certain way of finding death.' She held her two young sons in her arms, saying 'at least we can die together', praying to Saint Geneviève for protection.²¹

The fighting moved down boulevard Saint-Michel and then rue Saint-Jacques to rue des Écoles and boulevard Saint-Germain. The barricade at rue de la Montagne-Sainte-Geneviève fell, followed by others on rue Ulm, rue Lacépède and rue Monge. Jean Allemane believed that there were only about 200 Communards left fighting in the Fifth Arrondissement, some of them no more than fifteen years old. After two days of bitter fighting, on Wednesday evening the last Communal defences in the Fifth Arrondissement in the Latin Quarter fell to the Versaillais on rue Monge, next to the Roman wall of the amphitheatre, dating back to the origins of Paris itself.²²

When the fighting ended in the Latin Quarter, twenty bodies lay on rue Sommerard; more were scattered above at the intersection with boulevard Saint-Michel. On rue Cardinal Lemoine, soldiers roused from bed Eugène André, a mathematician and professor known for his opposition to the empire. He had not served in the Commune and had refused a position in education when offered. André, who had ignored advice to hide, was shot immediately, leaving behind his carefully calculated mathematical tables, not the kind of thing that would have interested Adolphe Thiers.

The Versaillais newspaper *Petite-Press* informed readers in Versailles and the provinces that the soldiers refused to take more prisoners. The news almost certainly pleased many readers. A Communal remembered that all that could be heard in the Latin Quarter were 'sounds of execution squads . . . at every step, bodies, every second, the sound of shots killing ordinary people'. This spelled the end for an eighty-year-old man on rue du Dragon, arrested for wearing the cap of a national guardsman.²³ Thousands of other Parisians met the same fate.

Rumour now had the Communards preparing to win back lost territory by sending National Guard battalions beyond the ramparts around northern Paris and then back into the western districts of the capital. By this point, such a tactic was no longer a possibility. Most National Guardsmen would not have left their neighbourhood to have participated in such a plan. The Versaillais, who had advanced during Tuesday morning on the Right Bank as far as the Church of the Trinité, seemed to hold back, for the moment not pressing the enormous advantage that they

now held. Many Communards battled courageously, as on rue de la Ferme des Mathurins, where guardsmen constructed a barricade while under fire from the Versaillais troops. However, the only advantage they held – besides, for many, their passion – was that they were now defending their neighbourhoods.

But the Versaillais did not hold back for very long. Thousands of Versaillais troops attacked the barricade of rue Thévenot, which had been well defended near rue Saint-Denis. Once the barricade fell, rue Saint-Denis was overrun, opening the way to the *quartier* du Temple, a centre of Communard support and a gateway to the Nineteenth and Twentieth Arrondissements. Few barricades now obstructed the Versaillais path, and those on small connecting streets were quickly abandoned.

Now that Montmartre and much of the Left Bank had fallen, the Versaillais were making their way through the Right Bank, getting closer and closer to La Roquette prison. The fate of the hostages would need to be decided – and soon. The prison pharmacist recommended that Archbishop Georges Darboy be transferred to the infirmary, but the archbishop refused to be separated from the others. Enormous tension hung over the *quartier* – and the prison in particular – as the Versailles troops drew nearer. Cannon fire launched against the Versaillais from the heights of Père Lachaise cemetery alarmed the hostages, and they greeted the slightest noise in the corridor with gnawing apprehension. The angry members of the Vengeurs de Flourens, a battalion of young Communards constituted in memory of the executed leader, were omnipresent in the neighbouring streets.

An example of the popular anger at the impending catastrophe in the neighbourhoods near La Roquette occurred nearby. Fear and outrage swirled around the prison in which the hostages awaited their fate. Charles de Beaufort served as captain in the 66th battalion assigned, before the Versaillais entered Paris, to guard the Ministry of War in the Seventh Arrondissement. When Beaufort tried to enter the ministry on Saturday 20 May, a guardsman had barred his way. The captain announced drunkenly that he could go where he wanted, threatening to ‘blow out the brains’ of the guard and bragging that he would purge the battalion. His behaviour won him no friends in the neighbourhoods.

Now, with Versaillais guns drawing closer and nothing but bad news arriving from other *quartiers*, Beaufort arrived to help defend boulevard Voltaire. People in the neighbourhood, increasingly anxious about their own fates, were quick to turn their ire towards this unwelcome officer. Marguerite Lachaise, who ran a small business with her husband and

belonged to the International, recognised Beaufort and denounced him as the officer who had sent men into a hopeless situation in which many men from the *quartier* had been killed. She, and soon others, mostly women, began shouting for his death. Some accused Beaufort of working secretly for Versailles. It didn't help Beaufort that, at the same time, stretchers were bringing back more badly wounded men from the barricades, the same guardsmen Beaufort had sent into battle. Several people went to find Gustave Genton, who had recently been appointed *juge d'instruction* (examining magistrate).

A forty-five-year-old woodworker who never knew his father, Genton was in some ways typical of many working-class Communards. He lived with his wife child at 27 rue Basfroi, not far from where he had been born. Genton had spent six months in prison in 1866 for participation in an 'illegal' gathering at the Café de la Renaissance which had involved Rigault. During the Commune, he served as lieutenant and *porte-drapeau* (standard bearer) of the 66th battalion. A Blanquist and member of the Commune, he had served in the National Guard, but had resigned after becoming ill. His friend Ferré then nominated him to serve as *juge d'instruction*.²⁴

Genton now set up a court-martial in order to placate the crowd. It quickly found Beaufort guilty, and sentenced him to be stripped of his rank. Delescluze was there and tried to calm things down, as did Marguerite Lachaise – although she had just called for Beaufort's execution. The crowd paid them no mind and continued to shout for Beaufort's death. Three men in navy uniforms grabbed him and hauled him off to a vacant lot just off the place Voltaire. There, they killed him.²⁵

At about 3.00 p.m., apparently to calm popular agitation, Commune leaders organised another improvised court-martial, over which Genton presided, this time at the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement. On trial at this court-martial were the hostages held at La Roquette, including Darboy. They condemned six of the hostages to death, apparently in retaliation for the summary execution of *fédérés* captured at the barricade of rue Caumartin near the Church of the Madeleine. In principle the execution of these high-profile hostages required a signature of a justice of the peace. Ferré signed the order, adding the name of Raoul Rigault (killed a few hours earlier, although it is uncertain that this news had crossed the Seine) as an authorising signature, along with a third name that was illegible. Genton and his secretary, Émile Fortin, arrived at La Roquette with an execution squad of about thirty or forty men and an order instructing prison director Jean-Baptiste François to turn over to

them 'without any explanation' Archbishop Darboy and Louis Bonjean (the former imperial senator), in addition to 'two or three others to be chosen'.²⁶

François insisted that he required more specific instructions listing the names of all those to be executed, along with a copy of the official judgment. Genton returned to the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement to clarify the matter, leaving the execution squad at La Roquette, rifles readied. The *juge d'instruction* returned at about 7.00 p.m. with an order that François again did not find explicit enough. It was virtually the same order for the execution of six hostages, signed by Ferré, who now added 'and notably the archbishop', the most prominent hostage of all. Fortin and Genton came up with the list of the others to be shot, in addition to Darboy. At the bottom of the document were three stamps of the Commune. Genton scratched out the name of Swiss-born Bonapartist banker Jean-Baptiste Jecker, replacing him with Deguerry, the *curé* of the Church of the Madeleine.²⁷

Finally accepting the order, François sent a guard to get the six men. The guard had no idea why he was to bring down these hostages until he came upon the execution squad, commanded by a certain Captain Vérig who had selected its members from men of the neighbourhood. They were for the most part young volunteers (some eighteen years old or even less) who wanted to avenge the death of their relatives at the hands of the Versailles forces. Two-thirds of them were from the 66th battalion; others probably came from the Vengeurs de Flourens, or were simple defenders of the Republic.²⁸

Ferdinand Évrard, who described himself as 'only a Parisian bourgeois', was in a cell next to Darboy's. An officer in the army, he had been arrested on 6 April after being taken off a train as he attempted to get to Versailles. He heard the 'chief of these wretches' shout 'I need six!' Two officers commanded the execution squad. Some prisoners saw an officer enter the prison courtyard and bark out, 'Are the soldiers ready?' Vérig went to cell number 23, to which the archbishop had been transferred the day before, and asked, 'Citizen Darboy?' 'Present', came the reply. Bonjean, in the adjacent cell, did not hear his name called, but his neighbour l'Abbé Surat told him they wanted him. He started out, then turned back to get his overcoat. 'It is useless', replied the guard Antoine Romain, 'You are very well as you are!' Romain told another who had to go to the toilet, 'It's not worth it!' Two of the priests swallowed the last two Communion hosts before the six hostages – Darboy, Bonjean, Deguerry, Michel Allard (a missionary priest who had been a frequent presence in the *quartier*

of Saint-Sulpice), Léon Ducoudray, a Jesuit and director of the school of Sainte-Geneviève, and Alexis Clerc, another Jesuit priest – were marched out.²⁹

A Polish guard from La Roquette's infirmary heard someone say to the hostages, 'You are going to die. You have done nothing for the Commune. You have always been hostile to it. You are going to die!' A guard who saw the execution squad remembered that many of them showed sangfroid; he did not see any who were drunk. When the gate was opened and the hostages were taken out, he heard other prisoners shout obscenities at them and denounce them as 'papists' and 'traitors'.³⁰

Clearly poorly prepared for the task, the execution squad discussed, in the presence of the hostages, the best place to shoot them. The first plan was to shoot them in the small exercise yard, but this could be seen from the infirmary windows, which they decided would be bad for morale. In the end, they decided to execute them on the *Chemin de ronde*, the 'Gate of Death' that led to the guillotine.

The hostages passed through two lines of executioners, waiting ten awful minutes while the keys could be found for the gate. Darboy asked if there were many barricades in Paris. 'Ah! If I could only go and die like my predecessor! I envy the fate of Archbishop Affre.' When a guard asked Darboy why he did not do anything for the Commune, the archbishop said that he had been arrested after the first real fighting. 'In God's name, at least spare us such insults.' One young *fédéré* asked Darboy of which party he was a member. The archbishop replied that he was 'in the party of liberty', adding that he and the others would die for freedom and for his faith. The response: 'Enough sermons!' An officer intervened, telling the executioners in no uncertain terms to shut up: 'You are here to carry out justice, not to insult the prisoners!'³¹

Following Romain, Allard led the prisoners, singing prayers in a low voice. They passed along the wall of the infirmary, until the gate of the second *chemin de ronde*. Darboy could barely walk and a guardsman pushed him along. Bonjean offered his arm for support. Another guard discreetly held out his hand to the hostages as if to say goodbye. Romain stopped at the corner of the wall which ran along rue de la Folie-Regnault and rue Vacquerie. From his cell, Perny could see Darboy below, raising his arms to the heavens as he called out, 'My God! My God!' The archbishop and the others knelt down and said a short prayer. Darboy stood with the others and blessed them, amid shouts from the Communards of 'enough prayers'.

Romain arranged them in front of the wall, with Allard first, followed by Darboy. The names of the hostages were read out loud. Deguerry

opened up his shirt to expose his chest to the rifles. Several minutes later, Vérig raised his sabre and commanded the squad to fire. Two quick volleys followed. Darboy fell. One of the men reportedly said, 'This old bastard Darboy did not want to die. Three times he got up, and I began to be afraid of him!' Vérig, to whom Fortin had loaned Ferré's sword to command the execution, later claimed to have given the archbishop the *coup de grâce*. Vérig proudly showed a prison warden his pistol, still hot from firing. From his cell above, Abbé Laurent Amodrou could hear 'first a long volley, then a pause, and then several single shots, and finally a last salvo'.³²

With silence engulfing the inside of the prison, the bodies lay where they had fallen for six hours, until 2.00 a.m., before they were taken to Père Lachaise cemetery, where they were dumped in a ditch. Darboy's sapphire ring, cross and even the silver buckles of his shoes had disappeared. Up in their cells above the scene, *Pères* Perny and Amodrou and the other hostages assumed that they would be next to hear the steps of guards coming down the corridor, even as the forces of Versailles drew nearer and nearer.³³

Since 4 April the fate of the hostages had hung in the air. The Communards' ploy to take Archbishop Darboy and other clerics hostage in hopes of discouraging the Versailles government from carrying out further summary executions, had backfired. Now, the shooting of Darboy and the other hostages gave Thiers an excuse to escalate the killing, both during ongoing fighting in the streets of Paris and in hastily organised courts or tribunals dispensing Versaillais 'justice' in the name of the upper classes.

With Versaillais troops moving up rue de Rivoli that Wednesday, the Hôtel de Ville itself was no longer secure. Remaining members of the Commune decided to move to the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement, at the intersection of boulevard Voltaire and rue de la Roquette. Théophile Ferré ordered the building set on fire and it was in flames by 9.00 p.m. At Ferré's order the Prefecture of Police was also set ablaze. That same evening the Palace of Justice burnt. Ferré's goal was to slow down the advance of the Army of Versailles and to ensure that, if they captured it, nothing would be left for them to celebrate. Another reason was certainly to burn compromising documents.

One Communist believed that the Versaillais gained two days because the destruction of the Hôtel de Ville, which was symbolic as much as strategic, and the fall of barricades blocking rue de Rivoli and avenue

Victoria compromised defences across the Seine and the forts beyond the southern ramparts. Thus the Commune lost a line of defence that had stretched across to the Latin Quarter. Communard resisters continued to retreat to their neighbourhoods in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Arrondissements, leaving no one to defend central Paris against the Versaillais troops.³⁴

Chaos reigned along with death. Many Communards still believed they could hold out. Edgar Monteil and Ferré were among the few Communard officials still giving orders. In one case, in the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement, they signed a *laissez-passer* for Edmond Mégy, authorising him to move about Paris and around 'all barricades'. It is unlikely the *laissez-passer* did him any good. Some Communard leaders had disappeared into the night, *sauve qui peut* (everyone for himself). In the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement, the remaining Communard leaders began to debate whether to move up to Belleville and make a last-ditch stand from its heights.³⁵

Elizabeth Dmitrieff was still fighting at barricades in eastern Paris 'encouraging the federals in their resistance, distributing ammunition, and firing'. She said that she was prepared 'to die on the barricades in the next few days'. Dated 23 May, her final written communication to Communard leaders at the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement was, 'Gather all the women . . . and come immediately to the barricades.'³⁶

The Courts-Martial at Work

THE VERSAILLAIS KILLING MACHINE HAD NOW REACHED ITS ZENITH. BY 22 May, some twenty military courts were in operation, with bloody consequences. A decree of the Government of National Defence issued on 2 October 1870, during the war and Prussian siege, permitted courts-martial during times of war and granted them the power to condemn to death both soldiers and civilians. Thiers took advantage of this decree after his forces had overrun Paris, using it to insist that Versaillais military courts did indeed fall within the law. It helped, too, that Thiers and the Versaillais continued to assert that the Communards were not political opponents, refugees or legitimate belligerents, but rather ordinary criminals. As such, he considered them to be under his jurisdiction and deserving of no special treatment.¹ The senior Versaillais commanders were not interested in legal precedents for the martial law tribunals they set up or, in a few cases, presided over, which failed to act within the law. The right to appeal convictions was systematically ignored.²

The Lobau barracks became the most infamous Versaillais abattoir. The *prévôtal* court (court-martial) was set up at Châtelet on Wednesday 24 May and operated night and day for seven straight days. Following rapid and sometime instantaneous judgments, prisoners were divided between 'travellers to Lobau and travellers to Satory' (a plateau near Versailles where Commune prisoners were held). Those headed for Satory might live, but travellers to Lobau were almost certainly to be executed. A British journalist estimated that between 900 and 1,200 were killed at Lobau in twenty-four hours under the supervision of Colonel Louis Vabre of the Volunteers of the Seine, a murderous friend of Thiers. The massacre was carried out ruthlessly, efficiently. As Victor Hugo wrote

in 'Les fusillés', 'A lugubrious sound permeates the Lobau barracks: it is thunder opening and closing the tomb.' Thus at Châtelet, 'it was by batches [*fournées*] that the victims were sent to the slaughterhouse'. On 25 May, at the Lobau barracks, after troops marched victims past the smouldering ruins of the Hôtel de Ville, execution squads did not bother to line them up, gunning them down in groups of about twenty, sometimes with machine guns, after they were forced through the door.³

The *Standard*, a conservative British newspaper, reported matter-of-factly that 50–100 'insurgents' were being killed in groups. The army would subsequently claim that officers could not find the names of those executed. Crowds of anti-Communards, now confident enough to pour into the streets of relatively fancy neighbourhoods, shouted for more deaths, and *La Patrie* reported that soldiers had a tough time trying to keep onlookers from assaulting *ces misérables*. Abbé Antoine-Auguste Vidieu of Saint-Roch watched the prisoners 'as one would look at the ferocious animals at the Jardin des Plantes'. He saw wounded men arriving as at Châtelet. Their crime was their wounds.⁴

On 25 May, by which time the Versaillais held well more than half of Paris, anyone living near the Jardins du Luxembourg heard the work of execution squads. Henry Dabot, a lawyer, was pleased to relate that many of the Versaillais victims accepted the consolation of priests willingly, but others refused obstinately to kiss a crucifix or to say a prayer. A priest named Hello was the chaplain 'of those to be shot'. Abbé Riche carried out the same lugubrious duties, 'more moved than any other by his awful task'.⁵

As Versaillais execution squads were at work killing prisoners, the fighting in Paris continued, resulting in even more Communard deaths. National guardsmen still held part of the Thirteenth Arrondissement, but increasingly those who had been defending the Left Bank had retreated back into the Eleventh, Twelfth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Arrondissements, the heart of People's Paris on the periphery of the capital. Against all odds, they kept up resistance.

Parisians loyal to Thiers eagerly greeted the Versaillais troops who cleared their neighbourhoods of guardsmen. Gustave des E. watched a convoy of prisoners taken at La Villette pass by on the way to Versailles. Now that a Versaillais victory seemed assured, Gustave's portly neighbour from across the street returned to his apartment, installing his mistress in his Parisian abode (he had left his wife and children in the provinces). Gustave and his friends were eager to tell each other their horror stories. A well-heeled man with whom Gustave dined at the club related a story

about being asked by Versaillais troops to assist in taking down a barricade. He had enthusiastically joined them, as 'reactionary number 1', that is, until his kidneys began to ache and he was forced to excuse himself. Another club member with whom Gustave dined related at least seventeen times that a shell had fallen above a room in which his maid – but not he – had been standing several hours before.⁶

At Porte Saint-Denis, residents in a nearby building who for whatever reason had not left Paris experienced the terrors of civilian life in a war zone as cannon, rifle and machine-gun fire outside kept them inside. Guardsmen entered and demanded that windows be closed. Then another Communard fighter entered and asked how to get to the attic so he could fire from there, using mattresses for protection against return fire. Madame Théo, who owned the building, did not want them firing from her window and offered them cognac and rum in exchange. By now the residents had gathered in two rooms as bullets tore into the building, breaking windows and shredding curtains. Another Communard fighter appeared and began to fire from an upper window. When Madame Théo asked him to do as little damage as possible, he took her hands, calling her *citoyenne*, and reassured her that there was nothing to fear. The Communard would fight until death but nothing in the house would be destroyed. It turned out that the person was really a woman, with short hair and '*une belle paire de Tétons*' (a nice pair of tits). Her husband, a wine merchant, had left Paris after 18 March. When the Communards of their neighbourhood had come looking for him she had taken his place, perhaps out of shame, and had been accepted by the battalion. The female insurgent then returned to the street, yelling '*Vive la Commune! Fire, citizens!*' Communard fighters followed 'their officer'.

The residents moved up the steps to the third floor. One neighbour was not doing very well; her husband sponged her off, and she was revived by smelling salts. The others seemed calm. There was no way out of the building, as the front door led directly to the barricade. No ladder, not even a rope, could be found to help them climb out of a back window. A small door leading to the house next door could only be opened from the other side; the owner, a nasty character, had left it locked. A national guardsman threatened that he had five minutes to open the door before he burned down his 'shack'. The door duly opened, and his neighbours found relative safety, at least momentarily, in the man's cellar.

Soon shells and gunfire came dangerously close, forcing guardsmen to retreat to the barricade at nearby Porte Saint-Martin. A guardsman put out of service a remaining cannon so that the Versaillais could not use it

when they captured the weapon. One officer stayed behind, seemingly awaiting death. A bullet struck him and he staggered a few steps towards faubourg Saint-Denis and fell. The fighting moved away, but not the danger, as a fire broke out several doors away. A woman who had taken refuge in the building drew suspicion. She claimed that Versaillais troops would not allow her to climb over the barricade in order to return home. The residents thought her an incendiary. It turned out that she did indeed live nearby on boulevard Bonne Nouvelle. The residents of the neighbourhood, at least those who were against the Commune or now pretended to be, feted the line soldiers who had taken the barricade with ham and sausages.⁷

That same day, Élie Reclus took refuge in the basement of a house. He found himself sharing space with about thirty-five other people of all ages and social classes. 'In normal times, these wild beasts would chase and devour each other', but now, in a time of enormous peril, they found themselves sharing space and an unspoken truce. Given the circumstances, any affirmation of political views, direct or indirect, was carefully avoided. Gazing upon pale bourgeois faces, Reclus reflected on what he dared not say: 'So, it's you, bourgeois. Now it's those like you whose cowardly ignorance and cruel egotism have brought these horrors, past horrors, and those in the future which you will inflict on us!' He could imagine what was going through the mind of the bourgeois as well: 'It's you, revolutionary of all evil, with your brothers and accomplices, through your criminal stubbornness, [who] force the friends of order to shoot you, and this I do not at all regret.'

Lost in such thoughts, everyone suddenly heard the unmistakable sound of heavy boots in the stairs. 'Property, Order and Religion' appeared in the person of three line troops, their faces covered with sweat and anger. With their bloody bayonets leading the way, they demanded to know 'Where is this rabble, where are these cowards? We are going to take care of them!' The bourgeois of the group eagerly arose and moved, beaming, towards the red trousers: 'Oh, there you are! We are friends of Versailles!' The soldiers inspected the others up and down, one of them proudly showing his pistol, still hot after gunning down a Communard. The Versaillais soldier quickly added, 'Yes, we captured two hundred of them and we shot them.'⁸

Elsewhere in Paris, Alix Payen, caring for wounded Communards, seemed surprised to still be alive. 'Our building was shaking as in an earthquake, doors and windows blown out in splinters.' It was impossible to flee; the boulevard on which she lived was engulfed in fighting and, in any

case, there was nowhere to go. Alix had no news of her husband Henri, who was lying gravely wounded elsewhere.⁹

Julien Poirier, fighting for the Versaillais, remembered 25 May as 'a real massacre', with women carrying infants and small children in their arms gunned down by Versaillais *mitrailleuses*. Poirier fought all day, as thunder, lightning and rain swept Paris. His unit fought near the Panthéon and down towards Gobelins, searching houses as they went. About noon, they came upon two Communards loading guns, and shot both in the chest. They were only badly wounded, so they threw them out of the third floor window. In another room, they came upon two young men sharing a bed, pretending to be asleep. A lieutenant stuck them in the side with his sword. One of them suddenly leapt out of bed and attacked one of the soldiers, trying to get his pistol, and in the subsequent *melée* escaped down a flight of stairs. In a basement, Poirier, his captain and some other soldiers found a young woman hiding there who offered some of her wine. Rumours that women were offering poisoned drinks to Versaillais soldiers had spread. The captain advised his men not to accept her offer. Nonetheless Poirier downed two bottles, and the captain, reassured, polished off another. Then, looking around, Poirier saw a young man hiding under a mattress – it was the woman's husband. They took him out and put him with other prisoners. Their colonel told the captain in no uncertain terms to take him to Luxembourg to have him shot. When one of about fifty prisoners tried to escape, they beat him and ordered him to march into a nearby garden to be killed. The man refused to go any further, so they shot him right there, taking the 10 francs found in his pocket for their time.¹⁰

The American Wickham Hoffman despised the 'communists', but was nonetheless appalled by the reprisals: 'There is no excuse for the wholesale butcheries committed by the troops.' One of his friends saw soldiers enter a house on boulevard Malesherbes and demand of the concierge if any 'communists' were hidden there. She replied that there were none, but the troops rushed in all the same. They discovered a man, took him out and shot him, killing the concierge for good measure.

No sympathy for the Communards was acceptable. When another American witnessed the burial of a Communard, he remarked 'Why, he hasn't a bad face after all!' and was advised by an officer 'not to express any such sentiments again'. House-by-house searches brought thousands of arrests. Line troops even went down into the sewers and catacombs of Paris looking for Communards hiding there.

Even after the Left Bank's last defences fell on Wednesday, Communard resistance remained organised, determined and somewhat effective in the

Thirteenth Arrondissement, near the place d'Italie and Porte de Choisy, and at Gobelins. Polish General Walery Wroblewski oversaw a line of defence that ran from the Butte-aux-Cailles near place d'Italie to the fortified wall and Fort Bicêtre. After four attempts, that afternoon the Versaillais troops of General Ernest de Cissey took the Butte-aux-Cailles, a neighbourhood of the rag pickers and the last Communard bastion on the Left Bank. The resistance had been stiff, but reinforcements poured in on the Versailles side. National Guardsmen abandoned Fort Bicêtre to return to defend their own *quartiers*. At the end of the day, by attacking from three directions, with the goal of isolating the *arrondissement* and taking control of the Paris–Orléans railway, the Versaillais killed and captured many demoralised Communard fighters. When the fighting ended, 400 bodies littered the ground. Wroblewski made it across the Seine to fight another day.¹¹

However, not all deaths on 25 May were those of Communards. Members of the Dominican order housed in Arcueil just south of Paris also perished. Léon Meilliet, Communard commander of Fort Bicêtre, accused them of passing information on military strategy and Communard forces to the Versaillais. There was some evidence behind these allegations; they were not just random. Local opinion also blamed the priests for being in cahoots with the Versaillais and responsible for a fire that broke out inside a château near the Dominican school on 17 May, although this was highly unlikely.

A number of Sisters of Charity were taken into Paris and held in Saint-Lazare prison. On Thursday 25 May, national guardsmen took about forty people, including Dominican priests and several employees, to Fort Bicêtre, where Communard resisters still held out. Two of the priests demanded that they be interrogated in the hope of being freed. They were taken to a judge, Louis Lucipia, who had been an attorney's clerk and journalist. Lucipia came to the conclusion that the prisoners were not guilty of anything, but told them that they were being held as material witnesses to the château fire.

National Guard commander Marie Jean-Baptiste Sérizier, a leather worker, member of the International, and a militant in the Thirteenth Arrondissement, that day ordered the twenty-three remaining prisoners (several had been released and a few had managed to escape) to be taken from their temporary prison at Fort Bicêtre. They were told that they would be moved into central Paris where they would be safer – Versaillais troops were advancing rapidly. Once out in the street, the prisoners faced insults hurled by passers-by. As they moved past the cemetery of

Champs-des-Navets, bullets from the nearby fighting began to whizz by them. One of the priests wearing civilian clothes managed to escape. After entering Paris through Porte-de-Choisy, they reached the *mairie* of the Thirteenth Arrondissement. Shells exploding nearby made clear that they would have to move on immediately.

The prisoners were taken at about 10.00 a.m. to a building at 38, avenue d'Italie, in the Thirteenth Arrondissement, which had been converted into a disciplinary prison. Barricades covered the district, many of which had used building materials from nearby construction sites. At about 1.00 p.m., Sérizier demanded that the prisoners, including the priests, be taken to help defend nearby barricades, along with fourteen National Guardsmen who had been incarcerated for disobedience. One of the guards protested against the inclusion of the priests, demanding a written order, but an officer ignored him, shouting out, 'Let's go, you there in the cassocks! Get out! To the barricade!' The prisoners gathered in the courtyard of the prison, and were moved towards the gate. When the prisoners left the confines of the prison shots began to be fired at them, some perhaps by their guards, others coming from the guns of people on avenue d'Italie. In the end, thirteen bodies lay on the street, including five Dominican clergy, a professor, three domestics, a nurse, a clerk and two guards.¹² This massacre had not been planned, but occurred spontaneously in the incredibly charged tension of the struggle for Paris.

Poirier and the other Versaillais troops arrived at place d'Italie soon after the prisoners were killed. They estimated – exaggerating – about 5,000 or 6,000 Communard dead. By now Poirier's unit had captured fifty-five Communards, whom they made stand on the piles of bodies while soldiers pumped bullets into them. There was one man whom to Poirier 'wasn't so bad'. No matter. A sergeant killed him with a rifle shot to the head. Poirier's company then left to join the remainder of their regiment on a boulevard about 500 metres away, their *mitrailleuses* still hot from so much firing. The Versaillais attacked a remaining barricade, with bayonets fixed. A Communard stabbed at Poirier with his own bayonet, grazing his coat. Poirier stepped back and shot him in the chest, finishing him off with his bayonet as the man struggled to get up. The barricade had been defended by eight men and three women, all of whom were now dead. All told the Versaillais may have lined up several thousand prisoners at place d'Italie. Poirier assures us this became 'a veritable slaughterhouse'.¹³

With the fall of place d'Italie that morning, line troops held the entire Left Bank. That same day, national guardsmen abandoned the southern

forts of Montrouge, Bicêtre and Ivry, falling back to the Right Bank, protected – for the moment – by the ramparts, the Seine and Canal Saint-Martin.¹⁴

The Prussians had helped out the Versaillais by abandoning the zone immediately beyond the northern walls, an area that was supposed to have been neutral. However, since the German and French governments had signed the Treaty of Frankfurt on 10 May, the Germans had been increasingly helpful to Versailles.¹⁵ Line troops now occupied territory north of Paris following the withdrawal of German troops a little further out. And, on 26 May, the Prussians readied forces to help prevent Communards from escaping out of Paris to the east.¹⁶

That Communard commanders had somehow not bothered to protect Montmartre's flanks within the city of Paris was catastrophic. Soldiers gunned down defenders right and left, as Camille Pelletan, a Communard participant, related: 'As many people defending the barricades, the same number of bodies. Slaughter on rue Lepic, across from rue Tholozé. In front of the house at number 48, twenty bodies lie along the pavement. Massacre place de la Mairie. *Fédérés* there were cut up by bayonets. Carnage Moulin-de-la Galette.' At Château Rouge, witnesses counted fifty-seven bodies, carted into the courtyard of a school. These included an elderly man, gunned down with his devoted dog barking at his side.¹⁷

A story about the death of a beautiful *fédérée* when a barricade fell quickly made the rounds. Arrested, she had pressed against her chest a red flag carrying the words, 'Don't touch it!' Her determination, and probably also her stunning appearance, was such that at first none of the soldiers wanted to be the one to kill her. They got over their hesitation, however, and gunned her down along with forty-two others. Augustine Blanchecotte came upon the bodies of three boys who had been shot on boulevard d'Italie: one was a portly worker in a blue smock. He may have had a toothache, as a bandana enveloped a cheek as he lay with his head on the ground, a hand to an eye, making him look like he was sleeping. The other hand had held a revolver. Little was left of another boy's head, his extended arm, rigid in death, recalling his last defiant gesture. A Versaillais had at least had the decency to place a handkerchief over what was left of his head. As the fighting moved on, women slowly emerged from nearby buildings, looking for their men. Wagons rolled by, their drivers asking if there were more bodies to be carted away.¹⁸

Defeated Montmartre had been 'pacified'. Once the shells and bullets no longer crashed and crackled, the neighbourhoods of the Butte appeared deserted, as if all the residents were dead – and a good many were. But

others had taken refuge. Rifles lay in the streets, tossed aside in haste by Communard fighters so as not to be compromised.

The victorious army rubbed the Parisians' faces in their defeat: 'Parisian rabble, slackers, good-for-nothings, you won't be bellowing any more. If you move, to Cayenne! And it will be your turn to see what misery really is!' They would show those Parisians. Montmartre's reputation as a centre of left-wing activism determined the fate of many prisoners taken by the army – they were more likely to be killed because of where they had been taken.¹⁹

Yet Albert Hans had to admit that, on Montmartre, 'errors' were committed in house-to-house searches and subsequent arrests. Indeed, one of Hans's colleagues had been arrested by line troops because his uniform suggested he was a Communard officer. As they were escorting their own comrade to a very uncertain future, the soldiers came upon others from the prisoner's battalion who vouched for him.

Then Hans found himself under arrest for intervening when two soldiers and a Volunteer of the Seine had seized a man they believed had shot at them from a house near place Pigalle. When they apprehended him, they found a recently fired rifle nearby, though the man claimed it was not his weapon. Hans convinced the testy captors to take him to his house and ask his neighbours about him, but they did not have much good to say about him. The Volunteers of the Seine then turned on Hans, accusing him of being a Communard and trying to protect a guilty man. A junior army officer shouted to put him up against the wall, but, fortunately for Hans, a captain came by and ordered Hans taken to a commander. The captain, too, wanted to have Hans shot, but, luckily, a more senior officer was willing to send him to his nearby apartment so that his personal papers could be inspected. Hans was freed.

Having returned to the Volunteers of the Seine, Hans came upon one of the women who had been taken prisoner at the barricade at place Blanche, thus the barricade was defended ably – at least in legend – by Nathalie Le Mel and the 'battalion of Amazons' until finally overwhelmed. She was escorted by a corporal and two line soldiers. She had the trousers of a national guardsman, with a small Tyrolan hat low on her head, walking as quickly as her captors, her face fixed as she stared straight ahead. A small, hostile entourage followed, yelling insults and shouting for her immediate death. A 'bourgeois' strode up and knocked off her hat. Another Volunteer of the Seine picked it up and handed it back to her. Nothing is known of what happened to the woman. For his part, even

Hans was shocked: 'How the spirit of the Parisian bourgeoisie was completely demonstrated in this act of cowardly and useless brutality!'

Near the church of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul in the Tenth Arrondissement, most residents seemed to welcome the Versaillais. Yet even in a relatively conservative neighbourhood, house-to-house searches turned up copies of Communard newspapers such as Félix Pyat's *Le Vengeur*, among others, preaching 'pillage', in Hans's words, as well as a decree signed by Delescluze authorising requisitions to assist in the defence of Paris. These small discoveries seemed to confirm how widespread allegiance, and in many cases devotion, to the Commune had been. Hans and the others then reached Gare du Nord, where several of the prisoners being held were killed on a nearby lot, among them a delegate of the *quartier* 'who died with dignity'.

Ordered the next morning to proceed to the northern fortifications, Hans and his colleagues came upon the remains of a barricade taken the previous evening. They paused to toss into a ditch the badly mutilated corpses of twelve *fédérés*, barely recognisable as humans for all the mud and blood that covered them. From Porte de Pantin, Communard troops could be seen in the distance firing from Belleville. Beyond the northern ramparts were Prussian troops, easily identified by their hats. They made their allegiances clear, turning in guardsmen who had tried to save themselves by passing through Prussian lines. The Volunteers of the Seine encountered some of their own soldiers escorting captured members of the 'Vengeurs de la Commune', dressed in blue-grey trousers. These men 'tremble[d] with fear' – and with good reason.

With the Left Bank subdued and Montmartre defeated, Hans's unit, along with other Versaillais troops, were sent to the last stronghold of Communard resistance: Belleville. They moved from Montmartre to Belleville and the Twentieth Arrondissement as shots ricocheted off the buildings. The Carrières (quarries) de l'Amérique, where many *fédérés* were hiding, stood to the right. Straight ahead Communards fired from behind more barricades and houses, trying to knock out a *mitrailleuse*. Reaching rue des Lilas with two companies of line troops, Hans's unit arrived at the heights of Belleville. As they approached a barricade, a civilian informed them that the cannon that stood behind it was out of service. Hans and other Versaillais entered nearby houses from which they could direct their fire on the barricade below. A shopkeeper let them in – no choice about that – asking them with a nervous smile what they might want to purchase. He quickly added that he was of no political party, adding that the concierge of his building had been shot by the Versaillais,

having been surprised wearing his National Guard uniform. The shopkeeper and his wife shook with fear; the soldiers reassured them, adding that they would indeed purchase some food. Nearby, two *fédérés*, believed to have fired at a house the Versaillais had occupied, were captured, surrendering when a soldier promised they would be spared. A colonel ordered their immediate execution, relenting grudgingly when the captor explained what he had told them.

Hans imagined at the place des Fêtes what it would be like to fall into the hands of the *fédérés*. He would be insulted, mistreated and probably killed, like Generals Lecomte and Thomas on 18 March. Prisoners could expect the Communards to 'cut us up into pieces or burn us alive', with officers unable to restrain their frenzied underlings. He was sure that any number of line troops had perished like that. But he assumed that Communards who were captured by the Versaillais had nothing to fear: 'our discipline holds in check any malicious instincts, the cruelty and ferocity that sometimes can spring up in certain circumstances from the heart of the mildest man'. Officers would of course protect prisoners. Ironically, he follows these ruminations with a description of taking another barricade – 'several *fédérés*, drunk or desperate, still refused to give up: we had to kill them!'

Hans's pride in Versaillais discipline and moral superiority did not extend to all of his fellow soldiers. More often than not, the Versaillais were ready to shoot anyone they captured, some soldiers wanting vengeance for a few of their own who had been killed in the fighting. Several hauled along two Communards, ready to shoot them, insisting that as they were their prisoners, they could do what they wanted with them. Hans and a few others protested and made their case to a cavalry officer, who agreed that the two men should not be killed. When the most adamant of his soldiers protested, the officer broke his shoulder with several blows of his cane.

They came upon another prisoner, a Communard naval officer – the fleet was small and obviously limited to the Seine within the city – proud and resplendent in a fine uniform that sported several medals. Hans mocked the rapid promotion of this 'officer', but the latter's courage impressed him – the prisoner asked only time to write a final message to his daughter. The Volunteer of the Seine overcame the objections of an eager colleague who wanted to shoot the Communard immediately. Hans provided a pencil and a piece of paper and the *fédéré* quickly penned his final message, while a line soldier barked, 'Don't be sentimental. This is no longer the time for it. Shoot him!' The prisoner stepped down into the trench and was gunned down. Several minutes later, another captured

Communard, a deserter from the Versailles army, joined him in the trench, defiantly shouting 'Go ahead, shoot me, scoundrels, bandits, murderers! Yes, I am a deserter. You will see how I am going to die! Long live the Commune!'

Hans could never forget another Communard prisoner, hauled by two cavalymen walking faster than the old man in a ragged uniform could manage. His face was thin, drawn, yellowed, and he wore glasses. 'Misery', Hans remembered, was written all over him. He was without doubt 'honest', a 'Don Quixote of socialism, a madman, an old marabou of the clubs'. At each insult he endured from the Volunteers of the Seine, he politely removed his National Guard cap, revealing sparse white hair. Hans spoke favourably of him to their lieutenant, and he ensured that the old man remained with the Volunteers, and not regular troops. This probably saved his life.²⁰

Many others were not so lucky. In a fancy western neighbourhood, Marie Holland knew well enough what was going on not far away. Her husband, the Protestant minister Eugène Bersier, came upon sixty corpses of Communards. He asked soldiers if he could at least take down their names so that he could notify their families. The answer came quickly: no. Women were being shot, too, and they got no sympathy from onlookers, who shouted, 'Kill them! Cut them down without pity!' If her husband would not be permitted to record the names of the murdered or dying Communards, Marie would do her best to do so where she could. She spent that afternoon working in an American medical facility, writing down the names of the dying so she could notify their relatives.²¹

More and more stories of the cruelty of the Versaillais, increasingly horrifying, now circulated among Parisians. A soldier allegedly raped a young girl, and then finished her off with his bayonet. Prisoners being escorted to Versailles, including a woman, never made it past Saint-Augustin; for no apparent reason, troops suddenly killed a group of them, with one soldier dispatching some prisoners with his sword. At Porte Dauphine, dead and wounded prisoners were thrown into mass graves. Near Tour Saint-Jacques, soldiers supposedly laughed and took turns throwing stones at a small arm that seemed to be moving in a pile of bodies until it stopped. A merchant did the best he could caring for two wounded Communards, but no surgeon was to be found. An officer told him that those under his command would take the men to a hospital to receive care, but the soldiers killed them.²²

An awful story quickly circulated: a woman asked to see her husband, the father of their four children, who had been captured. A general replied

with a smile that this could be arranged: 'worthy woman, we are going to take you to him'. She expressed her thanks, and several young soldiers went along with her, but no further than a wall, where they shot her. The Army of Versailles had given new meaning to the notion of 'reuniting a woman with her husband'.²³

John Leighton had little good to say about the Commune, which he insisted consisted of 'robbers, incendiaries, assassins'. But he, too, had to admit that 'they are fearless of death. They have only that one good quality. They smile and they die . . . the wounded men drink with their comrades, and throw wine on their wounds, saying, "Let us drink to the last."' ²⁴

Communards were particularly fearless in the Eleventh Arrondissement, where they kept up the defence of Belleville even though much of the rest of Paris was occupied. They built new barricades on Boulevard Voltaire, particularly at the intersection with the place du Château d'eau. Joseph Vinoy's reserve army had difficulty overcoming resistance there – the *arrondissement* had more effective military organisation than any other.²⁵ But barricades at this point were utterly inadequate, and the two cannons that protected them hardly enough to ward off the Versaillais onslaught. Except for an occasional hand-delivered message, there was now no reliable way for *fédérés* to know what was transpiring elsewhere in Paris. The silence above in Montmartre was a terrible sign. Down below, the defences at Porte Saint-Denis and Porte Saint-Martin were no more. The Communards still had weapons, however, and they were prepared to use every last one against the Versaillais. The church of Saint-Ambroise had become an arsenal. Bigger batteries had been moved above to Père Lachaise cemetery, from which shells were launched down into now-occupied central Paris, flying over the heads of the Communards on boulevard Voltaire.

At the Parc Monceau, Châtelet, École Militaire and Luxembourg, courts-martial were dispatching hundreds of Communards, men and women alike, after interrogations that sometimes lasted no more than ten seconds or so. Augustine Blanchecotte remembered that 'The noise of shells, which I believed unrivalled, are only innocent music when compared to these latest sounds. The most troubling and the most unforgettable was between the Panthéon and Luxembourg – the nightly sounds through an entire week of the incessant shots of execution squads, following the rapid decisions of human justice.' At Châtelet, a woman was killed simply because she was wearing a red belt. Like other female victims, she had managed to survive the Prussian siege without complaint only to be shot by a French firing squad.²⁶

News of the courts-martial reached the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement, which now served as the headquarters of what was left of the administration of the Commune. Leaders spoke gravely to one another, while one of them dispensed written orders. Bitter disputes and recriminations echoed through the building. Surprisingly, there was little palpable sense of panic; leaders, instead, became increasingly enraged, as more and more reports related the summary executions of prisoners by the Versaillais troops. Wagons full of munitions and cartridges stood in the courtyard. The dead and wounded lay here and there amid general confusion. All night long, messages arrived from the remaining points of defence asking for men and cannons, without which fighters would have to abandon their positions. The Commune could offer neither.

Tricolour flags floated above boulevard Saint-Michel. The *quais* had been taken. At place Saint-Michel, the Fountain of the Médicis was full of corpses, their eyes still open. Although the final outcome of the struggle could not be doubted, some national guardsmen continued to fight, despite the lack of effective or even apparent leadership. Reclus admired the fact that 'they don't give ground little by little. They hold on to it as long as they are living; they still occupy it with their bodies'.²⁷

CHAPTER 9

Massacre

ON BLOODY THURSDAY, 25 MAY, ÉLIE RECLUS REFLECTED ON WHAT HE saw around him. Paris had been transformed into 'a workshop, an immense workshop . . . but a workshop in which machine guns are at work, a workshop in which the work of destruction is accomplished on such a great scale . . . It is a horrible cacophony, this infernal charivari of hatred and passion.'¹

That evening, Communards mounted a sturdy defence at pont d'Austerlitz, with a half-circular barricade stretching between the *quai* on the Left Bank and the boulevard de l'Hôpital. In an artillery battle, the Commune lost twenty-six people, and had to abandon the first barricade. Soon the Versaillais had crossed the bridge and taken the quai de la Râpée and then Bercy. Losing ground, Communards set fire to the Grenier d'Abondance beyond Gare de Lyon, a measure to prevent the Versaillais from going around the sturdy defences of the place de la Bastille and firing down on *fédérés* from the imposing structure. Its smoke filled the skyline, giving off an awful stench of burning oil and codfish.²

Not far away, Émile Maury ditched his weapon and National Guard uniform. He walked down boulevard Mazas (now Diderot) towards the Seine. A few barricades were still going up, including one in front of his apartment building. An enormous barricade still stood on rue de Charonne. But not many people were left to defend these improvised defensive structures. Maury saw what was coming: 'The noose is getting *tighter* . . . the Commune begins its agony.'³

And, although randomness and serendipity continued to be features of the killings, the violent repression was increasingly organised, especially in and around north-eastern Paris, where the fighting continued. The army

had become 'a vast execution squad' as it continued to move towards the last bastions of Communard resistance in northern and eastern Paris. There Communards had had more time to prepare their defence.⁴

All Communard discipline had evaporated. Improbable suggestions surfaced in the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement – to form an entire column of remaining *fédérés* and recapture Montmartre, or march into the centre of Paris and take it again. Charles Delescluze was prepared to die. After an unsuccessful trek to Porte de Vincennes to convince the Prussians to intervene to save lives by arranging a truce,⁵ he now sat quietly at a small table in the *mairie* on boulevard Voltaire. His continuing insistence that all was not lost belied what he knew. He calmly wrote out a few orders. At one point he held his head in his hands, repeating, 'What a war! What a war!' His only hope was that he would die without shame, that 'we also, we will know how to die'. His *mot d'ordre* remained duty. Delescluze said simply, 'I don't want any more. No, everything is finished for me'. He wrote to a friend to say that he would await the judgement of history on the Commune, and to his sister to say goodbye, confiding the letters to a friend.

Wearing, as always, a frock coat, patent leather boots, a silk hat, and a red sash around his waist, he walked with Commune member François Jourde and about fifty national guardsmen towards the barricades at place du Château d'eau, which were under Versaillais attack. They passed Maxime Lisbonne, who had been badly wounded during the courageous, tenacious Communard defence, being carried by Auguste Vermorel and Victor Jaclard. At a barricade, Vermorel fell wounded. Delescluze shook his hand. As the sun set and bullets whizzed by, national guardsmen urged Delescluze to take shelter. But he kept walking, straight ahead very slowly to a barricade. Jourde moved away after the two friends shook hands. Delescluze stood on the barricade, awaiting death. It came in a matter of seconds. Four men ran forward to get his body and three of them were shot. Delescluze's body lay where it had fallen for several days, a courageous martyr for a cause whose end was approaching.⁶

Eugène Varlin replaced Delescluze as Delegate for War, but his tenure would not be long. Jaclard and a badly wounded Vermorel were carried to a building on boulevard Voltaire, where they managed to avoid arrest thanks to the quick thinking of the person who had taken them in. But near Parc Monceau their luck ran out and they were arrested.⁷

The Commune's leadership was almost entirely annihilated, but still the violence persisted. Anti-Communards sporting tricolour armbands

contributed to the carnage. Organised secretly before Adolphe Thiers's troops entered Paris, such armbands had been prepared in advance as marks of identification. Those wearing them now took on the role of military police, organising searches and setting themselves up in *mairies* that had been abandoned by the Commune. They responded to the wave of denunciations that began to arrive after each neighbourhood had been secured, carrying out arbitrary arrests. In a typical case, a concierge indicated to a man wearing a Versaillais armband that 'Monsieur B. buys lots of newspapers, perhaps he is hiding someone, perhaps a Communard.'⁸

Clearly Bloody Week provided French officers with a way of restoring morale and prestige after their inglorious defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and their failure to hold onto Paris in March. The National Guard seemed to be the antithesis of the French army: it accepted its men from all social classes, and many, including some officers, were ordinary workers. This flew in the face of the values of the professional army and its aristocratic leadership. Members of the officer corps, many of whom despised the Commune and all who stood for it, distrusted their few republican colleagues. The arrogant Ernest de Cisse hated the Commune and was eager to take revenge. Joseph Vinoy, who had been humiliated after the surrender of France to Prussia, and had been marked as a '*capitulard*' (defeatist) and identified with the failure to seize the cannons on Montmartre, awaited the chance to settle scores. He offered no apologies for the executions 'of modern barbarians'. General Félix Douay played a lesser role in the mass killings, having turned operations at Châtelet over to Colonel Louis Vabre, who gleefully presided over the *prévôtal* court. Justin Clinchant, who had moderate republican sympathies, forbade the shooting of prisoners in parts of Paris under his control, but he was one of the few officers who did anything to hinder the executions. Lesser officers followed the instructions of those who commanded them, yet with some variation depending on personalities, attitudes towards the Communards, and circumstances.⁹

Paul de Ladmirault was one officer who resisted the urge towards violent reprisals to which his colleagues were succumbing. He was from an old aristocratic, Catholic and military family from Touraine which had lost land during the Revolution. His father fought in 1792 against the Revolution, and there was no doubt that Paul would fight against the Commune eighty years later. Hearing the volleys of an execution squad, Ladmirault insisted that he did not like 'summary justice' because of the potential for errors. On seeing several pale, frightened Communards who were about to be executed, he stopped the firing squad and asked them if

the Communards had fired at the soldiers or were carrying weapons. The squad said they hadn't, but the captives' hands were blackened, possibly by gunpowder. Ladmiraault told his soldiers that the fate of the prisoners would be up to judges and not to them. He expressed some sympathy for ordinary Communards who had joined the National Guard in order to receive the 1.5 francs per day. At one point, Ladmiraault watched a badly wounded prisoner being taken in a convoy to Versailles. Barely alive, he raised his hand and fixed his eyes on his captors. With what remained of his voice, he told them, 'The insurgents are you!'¹⁰ Ladmiraault may have been affected by the accusation, but he did not retaliate in anger as others might have. He was by far one of the least murderous of his fellow commanders.

The mentality of the soldiers themselves also contributed to the violence of Bloody Week. Negative images of Paris, particularly Montmartre and Belleville, abounded in Versailles and across France. The propaganda seemed to have had the desired effect. In late April, for instance, *Le Soir* warned its readers that, once the Commune had fallen, property in Paris would require fumigation. For its part, *Le Gaulois* related that residents of Belleville had taken over homes in prosperous Passy and that 'all your cupboards and your wine cellar have been broken into . . . men and women lay in your beds'.¹¹ Soldiers conscripted from rural areas, especially those from regions with a relatively high degree of religious practice, such as Brittany and Normandy, were particularly opposed to the Commune, which in propaganda and in reality had taken aim at the Church.

Of course, soldiers also acted on the orders of their leaders. In the view of Jules Bergeret, a Commune member from the Twentieth Arrondissement, Versaillais troops entering Paris had received orders 'to give no quarter'. A municipal policeman related that he had proceeded with the execution of a Pole, referring to 'the orders of the Marshal [Patrice de MacMahon] and also those of the Minister of War . . . [which were] definite concerning deserters and foreigners who have served the Commune'. MacMahon knew what was going on, though perhaps not the exact extent. Like Thiers, he did not forbid or denounce the shooting of prisoners, at least those taken with weapons. General Alexandre Montaudon, for one, excused the summary executions, claiming that the soldiers took the initiative, following the orders of their officers. But he had to admit that hatred existed among soldiers for 'the agents of this awful civil war', which they had fomented in 'their meetings and in their [political] clubs'.¹²

One woman bragged that her brother, a 'distinguished' officer in the army, had ordered the shooting of 400 'obstinate insurgents . . . at the last

barricades of Belleville'. She added, 'The cowards! They were crying!' Another Parisian ran into a policeman who proudly stated that he had killed more than sixty people himself and that 'the cowards' had asked for mercy.¹³

Soldiers and commanders alike frequently compared Communards to colonial 'barbarians'. Théophile Gautier described them as 'savages, a ring through their noses, tattooed in red, dancing a scalp dance on the smoking debris of society'. Gaston Galliffet once contrasted the Communards with North African Arabs, whom the French army had been brutalising for forty years: 'The Arabs have a God and a country; Communards have neither.'¹⁴ Another general noted that, 'If given the choice between Arabs and these rioters, I would easily choose the Arabs as adversaries.' Many of the line troops had fought in Algeria, Mexico and even China, and, in their view, the Communards no more qualified as French than the insurgents they encountered abroad. Alphonse Daudet, another anti-Communard, intoned that Paris had been 'in the power of negroes'.¹⁵

Charles de Montrevel held that, of the Parisians who participated in 'this immense orgy', by which he meant the Commune, most were 'lower-class provincials'. His view associated large-scale immigration to large urban centres with social and political turmoil, as newcomers were torn away from traditional rural roots, including family and organised religion, which might have kept them in check. The result was a collective psychosis. This and no other would be the verdict of history, Montrevel believed. Gustave de Molinari was also sure of it. In his eyes, immigration from the provinces into plebeian, peripheral neighbourhoods had made Paris into 'a sort of interior California'. What was to be done to prevent the government becoming 'subject to a harsh slavery' at the hands of such people?¹⁶

A man originally from Bourdeaux living in the capital during the Commune had little good to say about the Parisians, whom he considered to be 'artificial creatures': 'The true Parisian, eternally and tiringly cheeky, [is] incapable of a serious and deep sentiment [and] laughs or is ready to laugh wherever, on any occasion: he respects nothing, believes in nothing.' Thus the Parisian was incapable of making political decisions but, rather, quietly awaited orders from 'stronger minds and free-thinkers, ornaments of common bars'.¹⁷ If they could not be political actors in their own right – as the much-despised Commune made all too clear – stronger forces would have to come in and set things right, even if doing so entailed unprecedented violence.

MacMahon, the one man who might have put an end to the executions, turned a blind eye to what was happening in Paris. On 25 May, Jules

Ferry reported that three of his generals had ordered the execution of captured 'insurgent leaders'. MacMahon claimed to have reminded the generals of his orders to send prisoners who surrendered to the courts-martial at Versailles.¹⁸ In the end, however, MacMahon simply allowed the slaughter to go on.¹⁹

Whatever MacMahon professed to Ferry, however, his commanders seem never to have received the order to send prisoners to Versailles. Commanders often ordered that Communards taken prisoner with weapons should be shot, although, to repeat, whether someone lived or died depended on individual officers. Cissey had no qualms at all – he notified General François du Barail that anyone found fighting for the Commune was to be executed. The missive reached Thiers, who knew very well about the summary shooting of prisoners and did nothing to stop it. In sharp contrast, General Clinchant, a moderate republican, may have attempted to put an end to executions at Parc Monceau.²⁰

However, some generals, like Gaston Galliffet, 'the star of the Tricolour Terror', took matters into their own hands and handed down instantaneous life-or-death decisions. Galliffet bragged that he had killed seventy Communards himself. When a woman threw herself at his feet begging for her husband's life to be spared, the general replied, 'Madame, I have attended all the theatres in Paris; it serves nothing to put on this performance.' The number of prisoners Galliffet ordered killed in the Bois-de-Boulogne will never be known, but he revelled in his infamy, once crowing that he would rather be known as 'a great murderer than taken for a little assassin'. He announced, with pride, 'Above all, to the highest degree, I have disdain for the lives of others.' He yelled at a convoy of prisoners, including Louise Michel, 'I am Galliffet! People of Montmartre, you think me a cruel man. You're going to find out that I am much crueller than even you imagined!'²¹

Although these executions stemmed from the murderous hatred of Versaillais of all ranks, and although they could seem haphazard to those who witnessed them, the massacre was organised. Even before the Army of Versailles entered Paris, Thiers had organised courts-martial to be held there. He fully expected that his troops would be executing Communards in the city. Given this kind of foresight, there is no reason to believe that he intended his men to keep all prisoners alive and bring them back to Versailles. After his troops entered Paris, they had organised two of the main centres for executions by at least 23 May at Parc Monceau (where fifteen men and a woman had been shot the day before) and the École militaire. The killings then proceeded systematically.²²

Journalist Camille Pelletan, a Communard, was convinced that the massacres were planned, and that lists of people to be arrested and killed existed. She thought that the Versailles troops encountering so little resistance, particularly upon their entry into Paris on 21 May, made it even more difficult to excuse the mass killings. 'Most [Communards], discouraged, gave up the struggle; only a handful of men, resolute, scattered, remained to defend the Commune.' Pelletan had it right when he insisted that the massacre was much more than 'a ferocious repression undertaken against the *fédérés*'. It was directed 'against all of Paris, and not just against supporters of the Commune'. Nothing like it had been seen in the capital since the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, when Catholics had slaughtered Protestants. To Thiers and his entourage, Paris was the enemy and merited 'a considerable, rapid massacre'. Thiers boasted in a speech of 24 May, 'I shed torrents of [Parisian] blood'.²³ And indeed, he did.

Those interrogated were routinely asked, 'Were you part of the Commune? You were there! It is written all over your face. Your age? Your name? Where are your identity papers? Well . . . Go!' This meant death. One victim was asked if he had participated in the insurrection. 'He's a scoundrel [*coquin*]', said a soldier. The presiding officer responded, '*Classé* [kill him]'.²⁴

There is thus truth to Pelletan's claim that the Versaillais had all of Paris in their sights, not just the Communards. Although Thiers's forces targeted some groups in particular, of course, some troops seemed eager to find any reason to kill those they encountered. They were by no means careful or discerning. One such unlucky victim was Jean-Baptiste Millière, who was arrested on Friday, although he had not participated in the Commune. When a captain named Garcin asked him if his name was Millière, he replied in the affirmative and said that surely the officer knew he had been elected to the Chamber of Deputies. Garcin said he did, but it made no difference to him. General Cissey was having a nice lunch in a nearby restaurant. When an officer interrupted his meal to relate Millière's arrest, Cissey ordered his immediate execution, between mouthfuls of 'the pear and the cheese'. When Millière asked why he, a deputy, was to die, Garcin said he had read some of his articles and considered him to be a 'viper on which one should stomp'. The general ordered Millière to be shot at the Panthéon, on his knees, and forced 'to ask pardon of the society to which you have done evil'. Millière refused to kneel and opened his shirt to receive the bullets. Garcin had two soldiers throw him to his knees. The deputy shouted, 'Long live humanity!' and started to say something more before shots silenced him.²⁵

Social class could determine life or death. Middle-class Communards were more likely to talk their way out of encounters with Versailles. Sutter-Laumann survived because he washed carefully, combed his hair, and spoke 'without a working-class accent in good French' when stopped by an officer of the Volunteers of the Seine. If those who were stopped spoke the argot of the Parisian street and workplace, execution usually followed. An officer interrogated a man at a barricade on rue Houdon: 'Who are you?' 'A mason', the man replied. 'So, now it's masons who are going to command!' The officer shot the man dead on the spot.²⁶ Social stigmatisation led to massacre.

Captured foreigners had little chance of surviving, because their presence in Paris corresponded to one image of the Commune as, in part, the work of good-for-nothing Poles, Russians, Germans and members of the International. Responding to a question from a Versaillais with a foreign accent could prove immediately fatal, as could having an 'exotic' name. Men over the age of 40, French or foreign, were particular targets. There is an infamous story of Galliffet 'reviewing' a convoy of prisoners on their way to Versailles and pulling several out to be shot immediately because they had grey hair – and thus had presumably fought with the insurgents in the June Days of 1848.

People were disrobed and their shoulders checked for marks left by a recoiling rifle, for which, if discovered, they were immediately shot. Men who looked 'ragged', were poorly dressed, who could not instantly justify their use of time or who did not work in a 'proper' trade, had little chance of surviving the brief audience before a *prévôtal* court. Near the Gare de Lyon, soldiers stopped two men and demanded to see their hands. Those of one were white: not the hands of someone who worked or had helped to defend a barricade. He was spared. But, according to a witness hostile to the Commune, 'his companion did not have the same fate. His hands, his rifle, everything condemned him. A shot from a *chassepot* finished off his account with society, and our sailors continued their searches.'²⁷

Men who had previously served in the regular army became targets, even those who had fought during the Franco-Prussian War, because they were assumed to have deserted. A few soldiers who had fought against the Commune were killed by mistake, including a wounded Breton, who had difficulty expressing himself in French. An officer took him for a deserter and shot him with his revolver.²⁸

Despite his insistence on making all the decisions and overseeing every aspect of the civil war, Thiers insisted that the executions occurring in Paris were out of his control. On 27 May he told Ferry, who had expressed

concern about the image of the Versailles government abroad after the British and Swiss press had started to denounce the mass executions, 'During the fighting we can do nothing.' Still, it seems likely that Thiers or MacMahon ordered the end of such killings on 27 or 28 May. Vinoy instructed a subordinate not to have any more prisoners shot 'without careful examination' of each case – in other words, Versailles did not order a stop to all executions, but may have decreased their number. In districts under the authority of Cissey and Vinoy, however, Versaillais shot Communard prisoners (including an English student perhaps killed because his name was Marx) well into June, both in Paris and at Vincennes just outside the city.²⁹

Adolphe Clémence compared the Versaillais hunt for anyone who could remotely be suspected of Communard sympathies to the 'hunt for [escaped] slaves' in America. Philibert Audebrand heard shouts of 'Let's kill them all! So that not one survives.'³⁰ In the Jardins du Luxembourg, the carnage continued from 24 to 28 May, with perhaps as many as 3,000 men and women shot there, many as they stood against the wall in the centre part of the gardens. Unlike in the aftermath of the June Days of 1848, when prisoners were killed secretly, the massacres of Bloody Week for the most part took place out in the open. Smaller tribunals also functioned, under the authority of junior officers acting independently in various parts of the city, but with the encouragement of the major commanders. The *Paris-Journal* reported that each time the number of those to be killed exceeded ten, a machine gun replaced the usual execution squad.³¹

On boulevard Saint-Martin, where many Communards had fallen, appeared a hand-written poster that said it all:

Officers and soldiers of Versailles,
 Beaten by the Prussians,
 Victors over Paris, four to one,
 Murderers of women
 And children
 Thieving in houses by orders from above,
 You have really shown yourselves worthy of
 The papists.³²

At about midnight on Thursday, Gabriel Ranvier, Varlin and a few others abandoned the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement on boulevard Voltaire as the Versaillais noose tightened. They first moved their operations to the *mairie* of the Twentieth Arrondissement, then to a building

near the place des Fêtes, sending the remnants of the military authority to 145, rue Haxo in Belleville. Varlin, Delescluze's replacement as Delegate for War, was still giving orders, but no one was paying any attention. The remaining Communard leaders decided that each would return to a barricade and do what he could. There was nowhere to go, no exit.

At 6.00 a.m. on Friday, the Versaillais launched an assault against the well-defended barricade at the intersection of boulevard Voltaire and boulevard Richard-Lenoir. General Clinchant's forces moved along the Canal Saint-Martin and Ladmiraault's troops overwhelmed barricades on rues de Flandre, Kabylie and Riquet, reaching La Villette and the Canal de l'Ourcq.³³

Line troops took place du Trône (now place de la Nation), from which their cannons could shell place Voltaire and their forces could attack the place de la Bastille from the east. They then took place de la Rotonde (now place Stalingrad).³⁴ The well-fortified place Château d'eau fell that afternoon, forcing Communards to flee. The Versaillais then took place de la Bastille. Line troops overwhelmed two enormous barricades protecting rue Saint-Antoine; there, more than a hundred Communard resisters died. An elderly Communard being led to a pile of garbage on which he would be killed said, 'I am a republican. I have fought bravely. I have earned the right not to die in shit.'³⁵ Elizabeth Dmitrieff was injured but managed to get away. When Léo Frankel also fell wounded, she saved him. A hundred Communard corpses lay near a barricade on nearby rue de Charenton. Communard fighters now cried, 'Better death than Cayenne!'

On boulevard du Prince Eugène and at places du Château d'Eau and de la Bastille, troops threw both dead and live national guardsmen from the windows of nearby buildings where they had been killed or captured. The air was foul with the stench of death. Among the corpses, many seemed relatively old, but there were also many young men. It was not uncommon to see men fighting alongside their sons, as well as grandfathers alongside grandsons. Reclus reflected bitterly that 200,000 'slaves' had managed to overcome 50,000 Communards. In reality, however, only about 20,000 men and women fought for the Commune, and in the final days there were far fewer than that. The Communards were completely outmanned. Small groups of experienced, determined resisters were not nearly enough.³⁶

National guardsmen retreated up faubourg Saint-Antoine, that traditional centre of artisanal militancy, and along boulevard Richard-Lenoir to boulevard Voltaire in the Eleventh Arrondissement.³⁷ The Versaillais now

launched a full-scale assault against boulevard Voltaire, a fitting name for one of the last remaining targets for the forces of clerical reaction against the godless Republic. As line troops moved rapidly into the Eleventh and Twelfth Arrondissements, *fédérés* retreated up to Ménilmontant in Belleville. Communard defenders heard only bad news. The Versaillais shot nine employees in a gas factory at La Villette, which fell in the evening. Word reached remaining Communard commanders that Thiers had announced that 25,000 prisoners were now in Versaillais custody.³⁸

That Friday Ranvier posted a decree, the last of the Commune, asking people of the Twentieth Arrondissement to resist the Versaillais in cooperation with their neighbours in the Nineteenth, again revealing the strategy, and the weaknesses, of organising the defence by *quartier*: 'If we succumb, you know what fate awaits us . . . Don't wait until Belleville is attacked.' But it was to no avail. No one turned up to help defend Belleville. While the last of the *fédérés* might fight to the death, they would do so in their own neighbourhoods without any effective military authority coordinating their efforts. In the end, the remaining Communard fighters fought in their districts, hoping against hope. John Leighton put it this way, 'Everyone gives orders, no one obeys them.'³⁹

With only a few *fédéré* strongholds remaining, there was almost no one to challenge the Versaillais troops executing Parisians indiscriminately. Generals, left unchecked by Thiers and MacMahon, did nothing to stop the carnage.

Melchior Arnold Tribels and his wife were arrested by the Versaillais on Friday while walking on rue de Rivoli. A concierge had denounced them after the woman became ill and asked if she could enter the building to rest. Tribels, a fifty-six-year-old shabbily dressed Dutch Jew, was carrying a sack containing 15,000–20,000 florins, as well as annuity bonds worth about 50,000 francs, two gold watches and a diamond ring when he was searched by the Versaillais. They also discovered a book containing the addresses of various Parisian bankers and jewellers. The Versaillais took all this to be evidence that Tribels was pillaging the homes of wealthy families. After his wife was released, he was taken to the court *prévôtale* at Châtelet and condemned to death. The next day he marched the short distance to the Caserne Lobau, where he was shot.⁴⁰

Edmund de Goncourt, no friend of the Communards, would never forget what he saw as rain pounded down on Paris: 'I am going along the railway line near the Passy station when I see some men and women escorted by

soldiers. I go through the broken barrier and am on the edge of a path where the prisoners are waiting to set out for Versailles. There are a lot of them, for I hear an officer say in a low voice as he gives a paper to the colonel: "Four hundred and seven, of whom sixty-six are women". Men had been arranged in rows of eight, bound to each other by a rope linking their wrists. They were:

as they were when caught, most without hats or caps, their hair plastered on their foreheads and faces by the fine rain which has been falling since morning. There are men of the common people who have made a covering for their heads with blue-checked handkerchiefs. Others, thoroughly soaked by the rain, draw thin overcoats around their chests under which a piece of bread makes a hump. It is a crowd from every social level, workmen with hard faces, artisans in loose-fitting jackets, bourgeois with socialist hats, National Guards who have had no time to change their trousers, two infantrymen pale as corpses – stupid, ferocious, indifferent, mute faces.

Goncourt's attention fell in particular on one young woman:

especially beautiful, beautiful with the implacable fury of a young Fate. She is a brunette with wiry hair that sticks out, with eyes of steel, with cheeks reddened by dried tears. She is planted in an attitude of defiance, spewing out insults at the officers from a throat and lips so contracted by anger that they cannot form sounds and words. Her furious, mute mouth chews the insults without being able to make them heard. 'She is like the one who killed Barbier with a dagger!' a young officer says to one of his friends.

A colonel took his place at the side of the column, 'announcing in a loud voice with a brutality which I think [he] put on to induce fear: "Any man who lets go of his neighbour's arm will be killed!" And that terrible "will be killed!" is repeated four or five times.' In the background, Goncourt and the other observers could hear 'the dull sound of rifles being loaded by the infantry escort'.⁴¹

When a barricade defended by 180 people on boulevard Prince Eugène fell, fighters took refuge in a nearby house. An English medical student watched in horror as Versaillais immediately lined up and shot 52 captured women along with about 60 men. The student heard an officer interrogate one of the women, telling her that two of his men had been

killed. 'May God punish me for not having killed more of them', she shouted. 'I had two sons at Issy, and both were killed, and two more at Neuilly, who suffered the same fate. My husband died at this barricade, and now you can do with me what you want'.⁴²

Even with Versaillais troops moving rapidly into eastern Paris, remaining hostages in La Roquette prison still had much to fear. A policeman and four national guardsmen went to the prison and took away the banker Jean-Baptiste Jecker, who had been spared by chance two days earlier. They took him to a ditch near Père Lachaise cemetery and killed him.⁴³ About 3.00 p.m. that same day, Friday, National Guard colonel Émile Gois and about 60 national guardsmen from various battalions arrived at La Roquette prison, where some 900 prisoners were still being held. Prison Director Jean-Baptiste François, still wearing his red belt, had been at the *mairie* of the Eleventh Arrondissement. When he returned to La Roquette, he received an order signed by Ferré and brandished by Gois ordering him to turn over fifty prisoners, including ten imprisoned priests, four men accused of spying for Versailles, two gendarmes and thirty-three *sergents-de-ville* (gardes de Paris); the latter two groups were closely identified with Napoleon III and the Second Empire.⁴⁴

François ordered Antoine Romain, the head guard, to bring down all the gendarmes and gave him a list of twelve to fifteen other names. When Romain asked for an explanation, François told him that, with Versaillais shells falling, better security would be available at the *mairie* in Belleville. Romain entered the corridor of the fourth section and announced, 'Attention! I need 15 [prisoners] . . . Get in line!'⁴⁵

Guardsmen piled the prisoners into wagons and around 4.00 p.m. they left, following rue de la Roquette to Père Lachaise cemetery and then boulevard Ménilmontant to boulevard de Belleville. At the bottom of chaussée Ménilmontant, they passed a barricade held by guardsmen. There a battalion commander ordered twenty-six-year-old Captain Louis-François Dalivons, a roofer from rue Ménilmontant, to lead an escort of eight men. The wagons reached rue de Puebla. A crowd formed, with curiosity turning into abuse as the escort drew near the *mairie* in Belleville. Then the wagons rattled into rue Haxo, where the crowd reached a point of fury, such that Eugène Varlin and Communard Colonel Hippolyte Parent could not hold off those calling for the deaths of the gendarmes, policemen and priests they could see in the open wagons. At the back of a small garden on rue Haxo in Belleville, national guardsmen placed the prisoners against a wall and shot them dead, helped by other men and

women who fired repeatedly into their bodies. Thirty-seven gendarmes, ten priests and two Versailles *mouchards* (informers) perished.⁴⁶

On Saturday morning, Ferré arrived at La Roquette in the rain. According to one of the incarcerated priests, Abbé Pierre-Henri Lamazou, Ferré 'rushed and sprang about like a panther afraid of losing its prey', carrying a rifle and waving a pistol. There seemed to be little hope for the remaining hostages. But with the battle drawing nearer, Ferré suddenly left. In the afternoon, a prison guard began opening up the cells on the second floor. Having been ordered to send down two of them at a time to their deaths, he had had enough. Ten priests, forty gendarmes and some eighty captured Versailles troops who he freed began to improvise barricades, using beds, chairs and whatever else they could find. National guardsmen arrived and tried to overcome the suddenly mobilised hostages with smoke, setting fire to mattresses.

Some prisoners managed to make it down to the ground floor. Abbé Paul Perny, a few priests and several others decided to take their chances and leave the prison, its big door now standing open. The risks were great. Some suspected a trap – that they would be killed upon leaving the relative safety of their now protected prison corridor. Moreover, dressed in ecclesiastical garb, they risked attack by panicked Communards, as the Versailles troops drew within blocks of the prison. Perny and some of the others did not know the neighbourhood around La Roquette. Where to go? To turn left after passing through the prison gate, or right? Perny ran out and knocked on the doors of several houses and hotels. None opened. To the priest, the ordinary Communards he encountered were 'modern Redskins'. As for the women, they 'surpass[ed] the men in their frenzy and determination'. Like so many others against the Commune, he reserved special contempt for Belleville and other plebeian neighbourhoods.⁴⁷

Several people whom Perny encountered in the streets were kinder, asking what he was doing. Did he not hear the sound of nearby gunfire? He decided that his best chance was to return to La Roquette. Perhaps the guards, some of whom he now knew well and trusted, would protect him. Several other priests, the seminarian and a few gendarmes had made the same choice after getting a sense of the chaos and dangers outside. They hid in the infirmary, even as Communards entered La Roquette and looked for them. Within hours they were saved by the arrival of Versailles troops.

Monseigneur Surat was not so fortunate. When he asked a woman for help, she spat out, 'Here you go, I will give you nothing!' The priest was shot as he tried to find his way through the maze of streets. Another

missionary also perished in the same way. In all, between 24 May and 26 May sixty-six or sixty-eight hostages died.⁴⁸

Now that most of the Eleventh Arrondissement had fallen, Versaillais troops attacked the two major remaining points of defence: Belleville, Buttes-Chaumont and Père Lachaise cemetery. On Friday night, Versaillais troops encountered stiff resistance near Belleville and on streets leading to Père Lachaise, where two Communard batteries and several hundred national guardsmen prepared to fight. The next morning line troops gathered at the porte de Lilas and then moved into Belleville, Ménilmontant and Charonne, isolating resisters. At the base of rue de Belleville, soldiers overwhelmed the last concentrated resistance. Versaillais troops took 1,500 Communard prisoners on rue Haxo, and at least 800 at place des Fêtes in the Nineteenth Arrondissement in Belleville. The Communard resisters had turned their attention towards a column of 1,300 line soldiers who had been captured on 18 March, who, for whatever reason, Ferré had ordered moved under guard from the barracks of Prince Eugène to the church of Belleville. When a nearby battery fell, twenty-three Communards were immediately shot. On rue de Puebla, sixty perished behind one barricade. Behind the barricade of place de la Rotonde, after the dead had been carted away, W. Pembroke Fetridge described blood running 'in streams through the gutters'. Dead horses lay about.⁴⁹

General Joseph Vinoy's army moved towards Père Lachaise cemetery very early on Saturday morning. Ladmirault's army overcame Communard resistance and captured Buttes-Chaumont. That morning, 400 Communards came down slowly from Belleville to surrender, all carrying their guns upside down. They were soon on their way to Versailles. MacMahon had promised to make Belleville pay. With Buttes-Chaumont taken and Père Lachaise cemetery under attack and about to fall, MacMahon's army did just that. Line troops fired shell after shell into the *quartier*, igniting fires. The Versaillais convinced defenders behind one barricade to surrender in exchange for their lives, then gunned them down from behind on rue de Bagnolet. On rue de Belleville, a concierge denounced several residents to line troops. An officer ordered them shot, and then shot the concierge, as well, for good measure – after all, he lived in Belleville. One resident went to find a doctor for wounded *fédérés* hiding in a cellar. A soldier grabbed him while marching a group of prisoners past and said, 'Let's go, you can join the dance!' His widow did not learn for three months what had happened to him. As the London *Times* related, Versaillais troops considered 'anyone who cared in any

way for the wounded as sympathising with them and thus meriting the same fate'.⁵⁰

On Saturday, Élie Reclus could hear around the Gare de Lyon 'several volleys of fire from the [execution] squads, about a dozen or two dozen shots'. The victims were prisoners captured in the basements and attics of nearby buildings, or simply picked up because Versaillais soldiers, police, or spies did not like their looks. Police detachments were assigned to each army corps and they searched buildings and arrested suspected Communards. The 'friends of order' took vengeance on Paris. Taking refuge in a friend's apartment, Reclus could see, as he peered out from behind a curtain, 'these poor disarmed [Communards], bourgeois or workers, in civilian clothes or wearing some part of a uniform, marched straight ahead, with firm and proud steps, but with faces so pale. In an hour, they would be dead.' Bodies were tossed into wagons, to be buried in deep ditches, covered with lime or burnt. Reclus had seen a convoy of ten to twelve *omnibus* filled with human remains. A red ribbon of blood ran along both of the Seine's riverbanks.⁵¹

After destroying the gates to Père Lachaise cemetery on Saturday evening, Versaillais troops stormed in. Many of the Communard fighters there fell among the tombs, some in hand-to-hand bayonet combat. The rest were captured and executed en masse. *Fédéré* prisoners were lined up in two rows against a wall, next to a very deep ditch. Machine guns did the rest, and most prisoners fell or were thrown into the mass grave. Georges Clemenceau later recalled that machine guns mowed down Communards for thirty minutes without pause. On Sunday, the Versaillais brought more Communard prisoners in groups of 150, 200 or even 300 to be shot, many of them falling into the same wide and deep ditch that contained the bodies of Communards killed in or after the fighting the day before.⁵²

Albert Hans insisted that officers had not ordered the executions. The fate of the Communards thus often depended on sheer chance; a humanitarian gesture by one of the soldiers could save a prisoner, at least for a while. Some Volunteers showed mercy. They would take prisoners to the corner of rue des Lilas and rue Belleville, with the death trench nearby, and, depending on what they thought of the captives' pleas, attitude and, in some cases, 'their prayers', they might spare them. Yet Hans admitted that some ended up dead in a ditch on the way. Inevitably, at Père Lachaise, 'a *faux pas*, a protest, a pause in a step, any incident, would irritate a guard and that was the end of the *fédéré*'.⁵³

Few could forget what they witnessed at Père Lachaise. Denis Arthur Bingham went to look at the cemetery after the massacre, and found tombs that had been broken open by shells. Bodies of those summarily shot lay fully exposed for all to see. Bingham estimated that there were 800 lying in one long trench and 300 in another, many near one of the cemetery's walls. 'Most of them', he noted, 'wore an expression of anger and hatred which rendered their faces perfectly hideous. It was a ghastly spectacle, from which I turned away with horror, and which long haunted me.'⁵⁴ A young American woman described the cemetery as 'the ghastliest sight'. The bodies of dead Communards shot against a wall filled 'a natural hollow'. Among them were 'many women. There, thrown up in the sunlight, was a well-rounded arm with a ring on one of the fingers; there again was a bust shapely in death; and there were faces which to look upon made one shudder, faces distorted out of humanity with ferocity and agony combined. The ghastly effect of the dusky white powder on the dulled eyes, the gnashed teeth and the jagged beards cannot be described.'⁵⁵

Journalist and Commune member Pierre Vésinier recalled the final moments of the Communard fighters at Père Lachaise and elsewhere, describing thousands of bodies that 'strewed the avenues and tombs. Many were murdered in the graves where they had sought shelter, and dyed the coffins with their blood . . . terrible fusillades, frightful platoon fires, intermingled with the crackling noise of *mitrailleuses*, plainly told of the wholesale massacre.' Vésinier reflected on the Versaillais' rationale with justified sarcasm: 'Property, religion and society were once more saved.'⁵⁶

News of the mass executions of priests and gendarmes at the rue Haxo kept Thiers's troops' hatred of the Communards burning. The Versaillais quickly went there to see the piles of bodies 'horribly mutilated, blue, swollen, black, totally in the state of decomposition'. This sight stoked the murderous frenzy of some of the Versaillais troops, angry that many prisoners had been taken and not immediately gunned down. A priest accompanying the convoy tried to calm them, telling them that they should forgive their enemies. Such advice fell on deaf ears. The good priest was fortunately able to convince the soldiers not to chase and kill a man who had refused to bow his head as the wagons filled with corpses passed by.⁵⁷

By Sunday, the fighting was almost over. The Communards held only a small area between Père Lachaise, where the Versaillais were still killing prisoners they had first incarcerated in Mazas and La Roquette prisons. Early in the morning, Varlin and Ferré were among those leading a desperate column in an attack on Versaillais forces near place du Château d'eau. They were soon running for their lives. The Versaillais had taken

Belleville, the last Communard stronghold, by 11.00 a.m. Goncourt went there to view the *quartiers* of the conquered enemy: 'Empty streets. People drinking in cabarets with faces of ugly silence. The appearance of a vanquished but unsubjugated district.'⁵⁸

Hearing that 2,000 Communards had just surrendered in Belleville, Hans hurried to catch a glimpse of them. That most of the Communard prisoners there appeared to be deserters from the French army accentuated the anger of the Versaillais forces. 'So, here are the heroes of 18 March!' they shouted. 'Ah, scoundrels, I guess you won't be turning upside down your rifles now!' 'Vengeurs de Paris', a few sailors and *gardes mobiles* were among the glum group of young men under heavy guard. Prisoners were herded inside a church; others began the long, painful, humiliating trek to Versailles, fortunate, for the moment, to have survived.

Hans and the other Versaillais soldiers expected no welcome in Belleville, but the bourgeois there greeted them with 'energetic' excuses for their neighbourhood – protesting that it had been the radicals of Charonne, faubourg du Temple and adjoining Ménilmontant who had given Belleville its undeserved reputation. Some shopkeepers seemed particularly pleased with the outcome; during the last days they had confronted increasing Communard requisitions, including civilian clothes that some *fédéré* fighters needed to don quickly after tossing away their compromising uniforms. Shoes were a major problem for the Communards, being far less easy to find than basic clothing, and combat boots (*godillots*) provided by the Commune were a dead giveaway ('Okay, *les godillots*, to the wall!' was an oft-heard command). Yet the welcome that Hans and the others were met with in the neighbouring *quartiers* was anything but warm: 'Written all over the men was utter hatred, constrained only by fear. Women had red eyes; more than one of these awful women gave us a look of burning, concentrated rage.' Their hatred was not always constrained, however; isolated attacks on Versaillais sentinels, soldiers and guards did occur.

Scattered groups of Communards continued to fight back on Sunday morning. The Versaillais took the remainder of boulevard Voltaire and crushed the last resistance in Belleville, 'the revolutionary den' in the eyes of the middle classes. Soldiers executed fifty Communards at one barricade on rue Voltaire, then amused themselves by scrawling 'Murderer', 'Thief' or 'a Drunk' near bodies. Near the Gare d'Orléans along the Seine, where two Versaillais had been shot in the final hours of the Commune, Julien Poirier and his company came upon a woman with a *chassepot* and a sword standing on a stump of wood; they killed her.⁵⁹

That morning, 28 May, Louise Michel could sense 'the raging band of wolves approaching'. All that remained of the Commune was a stretch of Paris from rue du faubourg du Temple to boulevard de Belleville. Soon at rue Ramponneau at the corner of rue Tourtille, a single man defended the last Communard barricade until he had fired his last remaining bullet.⁶⁰

The Versaillais killed Eugène Varlin that day after the fighting had ended. He was seated at a café on rue Lafayette when a priest denounced him to a Versaillais officer. An officer ordered him shot. Varlin was battered by a hostile crowd and beaten with rifle butts by soldiers until, according to one witness, 'his face was smashed to jelly, one eye out of the socket'. Dragged to the wall of a garden on rue des Rosiers where Lecomte and Clément had been killed on 18 March, he was shot as he tried to shout 'Long live the Commune!' Forty-two men, three women and four children were forced to kneel in repentance for the shooting of the generals, and met their ends there after Varlin.⁶¹

Communards who tried to escape Belleville that Sunday had little chance of succeeding. The Versaillais held the rest of Paris, and any attempting to flee the city ran into the Prussian army. German troops had expanded their cordon around northern Paris, preventing Communards from getting out. They escorted several hundred *fédérés* to the fortress of Vincennes, thinking it held by government forces. Realising their mistake, they instead turned them over to the Versaillais at Montreuil, where many were executed.⁶²

Convoys of prisoners continued to be marched to Versailles, some dying on the journey. When a young woman collapsed, unable to go on, a soldier cut her stomach open with his bayonet and threw her into a store, shouting 'Go die in there!' In another convoy, an officer saw a woman carrying a very sick child, who he took from her, but the child died along the way. When a pregnant woman, a prisoner from Montmartre, managed to free herself from the cords that bound her, it was rumoured that a soldier cut her down with his sword.⁶³

Troops forced prisoners to kneel as they passed the church of Saint-Augustin 'in expiation for their crimes' and others had to do the same at the Chapel of Expiation of Louis XVI, which the Commune had planned to level. Prisoners died along the way because, in addition to experiencing heat, fatigue and fear, many had not eaten in well over two days. W. Gibson, a British Protestant minister who generally found the Communards distasteful, related that 'one of our local preachers saw a man coolly [stabbed] to death by a soldier, and then lifted up on the point of the bayonet for the inspection of the lookers-on. No sympathy was evinced for

the poor old prisoner, and the two ladies suggested that the soldier should “chop the rat’s head off!”⁶⁴

As the world of the Commune collapsed, Maxime Vuillaume hoped to escape with his life. Replacing his National Guard *képi* with a little round hat, the journalist avoided *brassards* who were turning two men over to a platoon of soldiers. At place de la Sorbonne, Café d’Harcourt was full of patrons very different from a few days earlier. Vuillaume thought of a possible place of refuge, however temporary: Benjamin Flotte’s apartment in rue Saint-Séverin, where a day earlier he had taken Archbishop Georges Darboy’s letters. Vuillaume headed there, avoiding looking at the bodies of three women, half covered with straw.

With Versaillais troops now virtually everywhere, Vuillaume had to go to great lengths to avoid arrest in the Latin Quarter on 24 May. He encountered a medical student friend who provided him with a Red Cross armband, which, according to the Geneva Convention of 1864, assured his protection, at least in principle. As Vuillaume and his friend walked up rue Tournon to rue de Vaugirard, near the Senate, several soldiers asked where they were going, then took them to the *prévôtal* court in the Senate. Vuillaume could hear the volleys of a firing squad beyond some trees. An officer asked him about his armband. Vuillaume replied that it represented protection by the International Geneva Convention. ‘The International! The International!’ came the furious retort; ‘So then, you are of the International! Oh, God damn it!’ Then Vuillaume made a potentially fatal gaffe: he called a gendarme ‘citizen’.

Vuillaume frantically considered what alias to give, coming up with ‘a really ordinary name: Langlois’, a student he knew. He then tried to think of exactly what his interrogators would find in his pockets; alas, he was carrying a watch on which was engraved ‘Long live the Commune!’ He managed to let it drop behind a bench without the two gendarmes noticing. At noon, the military judge passed by the prisoners, a cigar dangling from lips. ‘Hats off, miserable scum!’ Vuillaume silently went over the names of medical school professors so he could recite them if asked. He listened to interrogations, which almost always ended with one of two death sentences: ‘To the line’ (that is, ‘in line to go up against the wall’) or ‘Take him to the brigade!’ Later, a priest, summoned to give consolation to those about to die, walked in, old, thin, wearing a thin smile, the *Légion d’honneur* attached to his cassock.

The officer presiding over the court-martial returned from his meal and the interrogations went on. When Vuillaume’s turn came, the officer

asked what he had done during the insurrection. He assured them that he had done nothing for the Commune; he said he was a doctor who helped the wounded, admitting helping the wounded on both sides (as his borrowed Red Cross insignia would indicate). The sentence was unavoidable: 'Take him to the line.' Soldiers waited until six condemned were ready to go, bound together with ropes, and took them into the Jardins du Luxembourg to be executed. As Vuillaume waited, a soldier shouted something about 'your *Père Duchêne*', the radical newspaper, but the target was another man. What difference did it make now?

A sergeant guarding the condemned asked Vuillaume what he did in life, and, seeing the Red Cross armband, concluded that, like him, he was a medical student. Taking pity on him, the sergeant pushed him back towards the end of the line so that Vuillaume might live an hour or so longer, and went to find the chief medical officer to plead the case of his 'colleague'. The young guard returned an hour later, which seemed to Vuillaume an eternity with the sound of murderous volleys ringing in his ears, to say that he could not find the medical officer. He had, however, had an idea. He told Vuillaume to *tu-toi* him (to address him familiarly) – they would be cousins. The sergeant departed again, reappearing to tell Vuillaume to follow him, and quickly. Incredibly enough, with him were the two Versaillais who had arrested Vuillaume. They took him into the café L'Enseigne de la Comète, at the corner of rue Servandoni. Over a glass of wine, the sergeant-saviour gave Vuillaume a new name, and, after dining near Odéon, took him to the apartment of a female friend, who, although quite terrified, took him in. Three days later, on Saturday, the sergeant returned, describing the latest rounds of executions in detail. He advised Vuillaume to find a new place to hide, warning that if he was taken prisoner again, the sergeant could do nothing to save him.

Miraculously still alive, and now hiding in an apartment on rue Richelieu across from the fountain of Molière, Maxime Vuillaume tried to think of a way to get out of Paris. For that, he needed a passport. A friend from school whom he hoped would come through for him refused to help. Versaillais newspapers had already carried reports of him being under arrest. A search of the building seemed inevitable. He considered one move, and then another. By luck he got out of Paris on a train without being stopped. When he reached a village, a rural guard became suspicious of Vuillaume, who had clearly arrived from the capital: 'Parisian' probably meant 'fleeing Communard'. But the mayor was sympathetic, urging Vuillaume to leave immediately, which he did. When he and a friend reached Troyes and boarded a train, police asked for passports of all

voyagers. They had none. Vuillaume was arrested once again but managed to slip away, thanks to an unobservant gendarme, and finally reached sanctuary in Geneva.⁶⁵

With the Commune completely crushed, and with Versaillais line troops, gendarmes, police and police spies now virtually everywhere – above all in ‘suspect’ neighbourhoods – survival in Paris required finding a place to hide. Reclus knew ‘a liberal bourgeois’, who had been a friend of his family for years, and was an ‘excellent man, besides’. On Tuesday 30 May, Élie went to ask him for help, and was refused. The old family friend told him that, in his view, other than the ‘friends of order’, there were now only three types of people: those who should be shot; those who should be sent to Cayenne, the infamous ‘dry guillotine’, where death was certain, but came slowly and painfully; and those who should be sent to Nouka-Hiva in the South Seas, which, if anything, was even worse. Élie noted bitterly that a fourth category might be added – those on the run: ‘Wandering in the street, going here, going there, trying not to give ourselves away and keeping away from police spies and those wearing tricolour armbands, or young zealous officers taking me for a rabid dog.’ This was real terror.

The next day, a republican family offered lodging. Élie wisely assumed another name. But he believed that now his best chance was to move from *quartier* to *quartier*, going quietly into neighbourhoods which had already been thoroughly searched for Communards, and thereby ‘slipping through the mesh of the net’. He eventually managed to escape Paris, reaching Zurich in 1872.⁶⁶

In Versailles, Henri Vignon, who had remained in the old capital of the Bourbon monarchy during most of the Commune, watched convoy after convoy of prisoners arrive from the capital. Each time that one or two tried to escape, they were gunned down. Armed with a pass from Versailles, Henri went into Paris and reported to his mother that their building had escaped harm. When Henri saw Paris burning, he added ‘certainly death is not too much for these *misérables*’.⁶⁷ Such a view became prevalent among the *honnêtes gens*. Communards could expect no sympathy from people whose hatred of them was unrestrained.

Prisoners of Versailles

VERSAILLAIS REPRISALS CONTINUED LONG AFTER THE LAST COMMUNARD defences fell. Adolphe Thiers's army had taken thousands of prisoners during the long Bloody Week, most of whom were marched to Versailles for court-martial. The question now was what their fate would be; that is, those prisoners who survived the reprisals. Indeed, at least 1,900 people were gunned down on Sunday alone.

An Englishman present would never forget 'the angry ring of the volleys of execution; the strings of men and women hurried off to their doom; the curses of an infuriated populace; the brutal violence of an exasperated soldiery'. The anxious visitor saw a man supposedly caught with combustible items in his pockets being pushed along by soldiers with bayonets that had just stabbed him. Behind the soldiers and their victim a small crowd of Parisians followed in the hope of seeing him shot, which they 'loudly' demanded. The Englishman had every reason to believe that 'the bitterness of the belligerents against each other is of a far more intense and sanguinary kind than that which ordinarily exists between combatants'.

As the prisoners were marched along, tied together by rope, their 'hang-dog look' was evident. Among them was a thin person in a National Guard uniform, 'long, fair hair floating over the shoulders, a bright blue eye, and a handsome, bold, young face that seemed to know neither shame nor fear'. A crowd 'howled and hooted at them'. When the women in the crowd suddenly realised that the youthful national guardsman was really female, they shouted abuse. Their target glared 'right and left with heightened colour and flashing eyes, in marked contrast to the cowardly crew that followed her'. At a bridge not far from place Vendôme, where thirteen

women had supposedly been killed when 'caught in the act of spreading petroleum', the Englishman came upon twenty-four insurgent corpses, 'laid out in a row, waiting to be buried under the neighbouring paving stones', with the 'gaunt shell' of the Tuileries looming above.¹

The Englishman reflected that 'the rebels' had neither asked nor been given quarter. They had 'made up their minds that death, whether as combatants or as prisoners, is their only alternative, and men and women seem to be lashed up to a frenzy which has converted them into a set of wild beasts caught in a trap'. This, in his view, 'render[ed] their extermination a necessity'.

The Englishman made his way to the neighbourhoods between Père Lachaise cemetery and Montmartre. In such places 'it was evident from the looks and tone of the inhabitants of this neighbourhood that their sympathies were strongly with the Commune. They muttered gloomily and savagely to each other, scarcely daring to raise their suspicious glances from the ground, for they knew not which of their neighbours might have denounced them.' Indeed, it was sad to see children among the groups of prisoners being taken away. He managed to obtain access to the court-martial, where he found a dozen prisoners, all male, 'cowering at one end of the corridor . . . waiting to know their fate'. Prisoners were marched down from Buttes-Chaumont, where they had been held two days without food. The Englishman was not exactly sympathetic. They were so common: 'A more villainous collection of faces I never beheld. There were many women, among them some in men's clothes, some dressed as *cantinières* or *ambulancières*, and very young boys and old men.'

As executions went on, the Englishman changed his tune: 'It sounds like trifling for M. Thiers to be denouncing the Insurgents for having shot a captive officer "without respect for the laws of war". The laws of war! They are mild and Christian compared with the inhuman laws of revenge under which the Versailles troops have been shooting, bayoneting, ripping up prisoners, women and children, during the last six days . . . So far as we can recollect there has been nothing like it in history.'²

Up in Ménilmontant, stacks of guns stood here and there, along with piles of hastily abandoned National Guard trousers and coats. Soldiers and residents did not speak to each other. The foreigner had been able to obtain a military pass that allowed him to move about as he pleased, and, when people from the neighbourhood saw this, they made him and his companions feel 'that we were their enemies'. In Belleville, in particular, it was easy to understand 'the scowling looks and stifled curses of the men

and women glaring from doorways and windows at the execution of a friend before their eyes'.

When night came, Paris fell dark, in part because of the lack of gas. In the poorer neighbourhoods, people stayed at home for fear of being arrested because of how they looked. Several Versaillais roughed up the Englishman after someone claimed that he had shot at someone. Such a vague denunciation could have cost him his life, but he was undoubtedly saved by his upper-class appearance at a time when clothes told much, and his British accent was impossible to hide. Back in central Paris, he was driven from rue Royale by the stench of rotting, uncounted bodies buried beneath the ruins.³

John Leighton went out to look at Paris on Sunday and came upon 'corpses in the streets, corpses within the houses, corpses everywhere!' He believed those who had been killed were 'terribly guilty . . . [and] horrible criminals, those women who poured brandy into the glasses and petroleum on the houses! . . . [But] were those that were shot all guilty? Then the sight of these executions, however merited, was cruelly painful. The innocent shuddered at the doom of justice . . . An unsupportable uneasiness oppresses us.'⁴

The streets and gutters ran red with blood. Soldiers forced residents to throw chlorine on corpses, making streets appear covered with snow. Thousands of bodies had already been tossed into mass graves or taken to the Carrières (quarries) de l'Amérique, buried in the catacombs or beyond the ramparts. The remaining bodies may have been left there intentionally, at Thiers's orders, so as to show ordinary people the cost of their defiance.

Count Arthur de Grandeffe, who had served in the Volunteers of the Seine, passed a Communard medical facility that day. Despite his hatred of the Commune, he asked if a priest could be found to give last rites to two men who were dying, and was told that in the neighbourhood 'there was little contact with those people'. But he insisted and a priest was indeed found. As he approached the two men, one gave the priest 'the look of a wounded viper still looking for a way to bite you'. Both had in their eyes 'the seeds of Hell'. Grandeffe's sympathy for the dying Communards was limited, and he concluded that what he had seen could be blamed on 'modern education'. He believed that the time had come to enlighten Parisians on the dangers that would lie ahead if they rose up again. Summary executions, Grandeffe decided, were a good start.⁵

Even Edmond Goncourt was unprepared for what he saw. Nearing Châtelet, suddenly he saw 'the crowd head over heels in flight like a mob being charged on a day of a riot. Horsemen appear, threatening, swords in

hand, rearing up their horses and forcing the promenaders from the street to the pavements.' The soldiers were pushing along a bearded man whose forehead was bound by a handkerchief. Another in a state of collapse was practically carried along by two others. One had 'a special pallor and a vague look which remains in my memory. I hear a woman shout as she takes herself off: "How sorry I am I came this far!" Next to me a placid bourgeois is counting: "One, two, three . . ." There were twenty-six. Their armed escort marches them rapidly into the Lobau Barracks, where the gate closes after them with a strange violence and precipitation.'

Goncourt still did not understand, but felt 'an indefinable anxiety. My bourgeois companion, who had just been counting them, then says to a neighbour: "It won't be long, you'll soon hear the first volley." "What volley?" "Why, they're going to shoot them!"' Immediately there was a violent explosion within the closed gates and walls, followed by 'a fusillade having something of the mechanical regularity of a machine gun. There is a first, a second, a third, a fourth, a fifth murderous *rrarra* – then a long interval – and then a sixth, and still two more volleys, one right after the other.'

The shooting seemed to go on forever. When it finally stopped, 'everybody feels relieved and is beginning to breathe when there is a shattering sound which makes the sprung door of the barracks move on its hinges; then another; then finally the last'. These were the *coups de grâce* finishing off those who were still alive: 'At that moment, like a band of drunken men, the execution squad comes out of the door with blood on the end of some of their bayonets. And while two closed vans go into the courtyard a priest slips out, and for a long time you see his thin back, his umbrella, his legs walking unsteadily along the outer wall of the barracks.'⁶

Paris was now placed under military rule and divided into four sections commanded by Joseph Vinoy, Ernest de Cisse, Paul de Ladmirault and Félix Douay. Searches of houses, often sparked by denunciations, continued unabated. And as Marc-André Gromier, a journalist, put it, at this time 'each denunciation was a decree of death'. The red flags were gone. The tricolour flag had become the 'flag of massacre'. On Monday, the fort of Vincennes surrendered, Prussian troops having isolated it from Paris. Versaillais forces promised to spare the lives of Communard fighters there, then shot nine officers, tossing their bodies into the enormous moat.⁷

The convoys of prisoners being taken to Versailles grew longer. Gromier was arrested at 5.00 a.m. on Sunday and thrown into the basement in a barracks on rue du faubourg Poissonnière, not far from his

home. As it was for so many others, the trip there was brutal. Angry shouts and rocks greeted them and 'a dog . . . dressed as a prostitute, tried to strike me with the end of her umbrella'. When several onlookers from his *quartier* saluted him, others jumped them, fists flying. A soldier took care to crush Gromier's hat with his rifle. In the barracks, there were already about 500 men, women and children, some dead, others dying, including a man missing both legs. He saw a boy of about fifteen tied by rope to window bars. A Versaillais asked Gromier if he knew him. Before he could answer, the boy cried out that he did not know him, for he lived in the *quartier* of Clignancourt. Soldiers stabbed the boy repeatedly with bayonets.

Gromier and a convoy of twenty-six other prisoners then marched under heavy guard to Parc Monceau, starving and thirsty. Gromier saw a former surgeon in his National Guard battalion, now resplendent wearing a tricolour armband. The next trek was to Versailles. At pont Saint-Cloud, a woman fell and was shot. Three older men said they could go no further, and were hit with rifles, then pushed off to the side and shot. Another five men and a woman were killed along the way. Gromier had no idea why. In Versailles, two little girls, three women and an old man were taken from the convoy. They too were probably shot. Finally, after a forced march of many hours, Gromier and the others reached Satory, a Versaillais prison area on the plateau of the same name, where they saw a machine gun ready to function. They could see two huge ditches, one full of bodies, the other a latrine. Troops occasionally fired at groups of prisoners. Not far away, 'an intermittent fusillade. Those who protested in any way: shot. Those who demanded to be able to go to the toilet: shot. Those who a fever had made crazy: shot.' On 6–7 June, seven out of the twenty-seven in Gromier's group would be killed. Each morning, bodies were taken away. Some prisoners were shot if the guards did not like their responses when asked their names, or if they refused at first to give up personal items, which they feared, with good reason, would be stolen. One evening, Gromier was taken to an improvised court-martial in Versailles. He received six months in prison but at least was alive.⁸

Another young Englishman was very lucky to escape the Versaillais rampage. In the wrong place at the wrong time, he found himself taken prisoner in a roundup. From some direction came the sound of shooting, 'and then a whisper went around, "They're going to shoot us all!"' He would never forget 'the agonised look on the faces of some . . . It was a complete index of what was passing in their minds. To die thus, and leave wife, children, parents, brothers, or sister, without one word of

farewell . . . is fearful . . . Soon it will be over. A rifle shot and that's it!' A boy of fifteen had with him documents that he said would prove his innocence. A Versaillais officer hit him: 'Shut up, bastard!' In contrast, a boy of about nine years 'never uttered a word of complaint'. He took the young Englishman's hand 'and from that time till the close of that terrible day we marched hand in hand, he never relaxing his grasp except when absolutely necessary. Meanwhile, the executions went on.' The convoy marched to the Church of the Madeleine and down rue Royale to place de la Concorde and up Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe. The sun beat down, and the captives were given nothing to eat or drink.⁹

General Gaston Galliffet showed up, heaping abuse on the prisoners. He ordered an elderly man to step out of the line: 'Step out of that line, you old bastards! And you . . . you're wounded! Well, we'll take care of you!' – leaving no doubt about what would happen next. A young man waved an American passport: 'Shut up, we have more than enough foreigners and rabble here. We have to get rid of them.'¹⁰

Some old men and wounded prisoners were shot, and more volleys in the distance signalled that men in that convoy had fallen and could not go on. The Englishman and the others reached Versailles and then Satory at 8.00 p.m. There, the crowds calling for their death were elegantly dressed: 'Ah ha! We have some of those petrol bombs that you know so well reserved for you. There are [also] machine guns, miserable scoundrels [*sacrés coquins*]'! The young foreigner was finally released. He had been lucky. What he had seen changed his view of the Communards, for whom he now had sympathy.¹¹

Some 35,000–40,000 prisoners made the awful trek from Paris – most from eastern districts – to Versailles. Prisoners who refused to move any further, or who were unable to do so because of wounds, other infirmities or age, were gunned down. In one incident, a prisoner sat down, unable to go on. After being prodded by soldiers with bayonets he was placed on a horse, from which he immediately fell. The troops then attached him to the horse's tail, and he was dragged until unconscious from loss of blood. The soldiers showed a little mercy: instead of simply shooting him, they tossed him onto a wagon for the remainder of the journey.¹² Many women and no small number of children, most from twelve to sixteen years old, but some even younger, were among those in the convoys. A Versaillais crowd assailed the editor of *Journal des Débats* who dared express some sympathy for the prisoners chained together in the sun. Troops had to rescue him.¹³

Most of the 'voyagers' to Satory were not combatants at all – many of those had already perished. Rather, they were Parisians who happened to

be in the wrong place at the wrong time and were rounded up by Versaillais troops. Some women carried their children in their arms or on their shoulders as they walked; others had their arms so tightly tied that they bled. They were escorted by 'gendarmes already become hangmen'. In Camille Pelletan's opinion, the worst abuses along the way came in rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré, where 'the aristocratic hangers-on came down into the streets to insult, threaten and mistreat prisoners'. In some other neighbourhoods, observers were more respectful, some making the sign of the cross as the prisoners were taken by. This was not the case of rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, where a furious elderly woman threw herself on a convoy of prisoners, flailing away at them with her umbrella.¹⁴

In Versailles, '*tout Paris*' awaited the arrival of prisoners, preparing for the spectacle as if waiting for the start of a horse race. Officers told one convoy to stop so the fancy folks could have a good look at them. One well-dressed woman, carrying a prayer book, demanded that a young *cantinière* salute God. When she refused, the woman hit her, breaking a tooth. Here was Christian charity at work in Versailles.¹⁵

A journalist for *Figaro*, a pro-Thiers newspaper, focused on the 'disrespect' for hostile onlookers shown by several prisoners among the 'hideous troops' being transported to an uncertain future. A *cantinière* waved what was left of her bloody hand (having lost several fingers in the fighting) in the direction of those heaping insults on her and the others. Fashionable women struck at Communards with their parasols, shouting for their execution. Prisoners in at least one convoy were forced to take off their hats or caps if they had one: 'Let's go! Rabble! Hats off before *les honnêtes gens*!'¹⁶

Eager upper-class people peppered soldiers who had returned from Paris with questions. One Versaillais line soldier bragged that he had killed a woman. Another went for what was for him one better: 'Me, I killed a child incendiary with my bayonet.' A 'respectable' lady, her Mass missal still in her hands, interrupted to say, 'Really, my friend?' She reached into her purse and gave him money. Some soldiers reportedly sold as souvenirs objects taken from the bodies of Communards.¹⁷

Reaching Versailles, the women were put in the prison of Chantiers, the men in the hell-hole of Satory, where 3–4,000 prisoners were virtually piled one on top of another. There, with barely enough room to turn around or lie down, disease, infection and gangrene took hold while guards pointed their rifles at the prisoners, threatening to shoot anyone for any act of defiance. Some soldiers may have amused themselves by doing just that. Desperately thirsty, prisoners drank rainwater, which sometimes

had a red tint from the blood of wounds or corpses. Life – and death – at the Chantiers was almost as bad. Prisoners slept on straw, or simply on the ground, sharing space with lice. Clothing and food brought by relatives who had become aware of the location of family members remained stacked up on the outside, most never reaching the women. Some prisoners held temporarily in the Orangerie entertained themselves by taking care of plants, looking back beyond the guards at curious onlookers who came to gawp at them.¹⁸

Louise Michel was in one of the Versailles camps for prisoners. Soldiers told her that she would be shot. As she recalled, 'Above us the lights of the fires [in the distance in Paris] floated like red crepe. And always we could hear the cannons . . . In the middle of the night the soldiers would call out groups of prisoners, who got up from the mud to follow the soldier's lantern that led their way. They'd be given a pick and shovel to dig their own graves, and then they'd be shot. The echoes of volleys shattered the silence of the night.' Michel was 'insolent' to the soldiers and did not know why she was not shot. Millions of lice 'made little silver nets as they meandered about, going to their nests that resembles anthills. They were enormous.' Prisoners had the impression that they could actually hear the 'noise of their swarming'.¹⁹

As more and more Communard prisoners arrived in Versailles, *les honnêtes gens* found new ways of condemning the defeated Communards. The claim that the riffraff from Paris were drunks was a popular notion that emerged in Versaillais discourse, with references to the dependence of 'drunken commoners' on absinthe, which was already ravaging the French population. Enemies often described the Communards as *crapules*, a term of extreme denigration that comes from the Latin word for drunkenness.²⁰

Versaillais lore had insurgents supposedly storming into a restaurant on boulevard Saint-Martin, plunging into fine wines and liqueurs found in the cellar. When they had had their fill, the intruders supposedly announced that they planned to shoot 'the brave soldiers' attacking Paris. A loyal anti-Communard stepped forward and slapped 'one of those bastards', or so went the story. The Communards then pillaged the house, killing the *honnêtes gens* who opposed 'their orgies', and set fire to the establishment. When a panicked woman managed to extract her daughter from the flames, the Communards pushed both back in, and they burned to death. This, of course, never occurred, but that was of no matter to the *honnêtes gens*. Ironically, some of the Versaillais line soldiers who killed may have been drunk, the effects of the alcohol compounded by sun and fatigue.²¹

As thousands of prisoners awaited their fates in Versailles, 'liberated' Paris suffered 'the sickness of denunciations'. Of all the horrendous statistics surrounding Bloody Week, one of the most chilling is that, between 22 May and 13 June, the Prefecture of Police received 379,823 denunciations of people accused of serving the Commune. Of these, only 5 per cent were actually signed. Of course, what makes this number so astonishing is the fact that those who denounced neighbours were very well aware that, if the Versailles authorities took the denunciations seriously and if the accusation seemed grave – simply being in favour of the Commune was taken seriously – execution could follow. To be sure, a few of these were attempts to settle personal debts or conflicts. Others may have hoped to receive the rumoured 500 francs for turning in a Communard. There were cases of denunciations leading to people being killed, as in the case of the Marquis de Forbin-Janson, who denounced some of his neighbours and tenants, leading to one of them being shot. One Parisian, acquitted by a court-martial, had been denounced seventeen times.²²

On 1 June, two men, one wounded, turned up at the door of the house next to where Pastor Eugène Bersier and Marie Holland lived. Only the domestic was at home. They asked to be taken in, as they knew the nephew of the owner. The woman let them in and provided a bed for the wounded man. She then denounced them to the police. Soldiers arrived to take them away, one on a stretcher, the other walking head down, very pale. Marie Holland was sickened. The pastor received a visit from a certain M. Bockairy, who told her that she would be happy to learn that a Communard officer had been shot and that of his men 'not one escaped'. The smug bourgeois seemed to her for a moment even more odious than the Communards she despised.²³

With the return of the old civil police, police spies were everywhere, proudly sporting tricolour armbands. Jacques Durant, a fifty-three-year-old shoemaker who had been elected to the Commune from the Second Arrondissement, was denounced and hauled off to the *mairie*. After an interrogation of not more than two minutes, he was shot in a courtyard adjoining the church of the Petits-Pères. Édouard Moreau, who had opposed burning the Grenier de l'Abondance, was arrested after being denounced while hiding near rue Saint-Antoine. At Châtelet, Louis Vabre, the provost marshal, asked him if he was indeed M. Édouard Moreau, member of the Commune? Moreau replied, 'No, of the Central Committee [of the National Guard].' The response came immediately, 'It's the same thing!' He was taken to Caserne Lobau and shot with another batch of victims.²⁴

The denunciations primarily targeted ordinary people, reflecting the Versaillais assumption that one's social class was marker enough of one's involvement in the Commune. General Louis Valentin, serving Thiers as prefect of police, said that 'the simple fact of having stayed in Paris under the Commune is a crime. Everyone there is to blame, and if I had my way everyone would be punished.'²⁵ Many working-class Parisians had indeed supported the Commune, but even those who had not were targeted. Those left in Paris during the Commune were overwhelmingly working-class, unable to get out and with nowhere to go.

Prisoners identified as foreigners were singled out for particular vociferous contempt, primarily because foreigners who had remained in Paris during the Commune were assumed to be part of the International. One rumour had 10,000 Poles among the Communards. Denis Arthur Bingham noted that 'virtuous Parisians claimed that the insurrection was the work of foreigners' such as Italians and Poles. The conservative historian Hippolyte Taine subscribed to this belief, insisting that half of the 100,000 '*insurgés*' were not French. The literary critic Paul de Saint-Victor denounced 'Polish forgers, "gallant" Garibaldians [followers of the nationalist Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi], mercenary Slavic soldiers, Prussian agents, Yankee buccaneers stampeding in from of their battalions . . . Paris has become the sewer collecting the dregs and scum of two worlds.' Some of the Poles had fought courageously but futilely against Russian 'Congress Poland' in 1863. For her part, Louise Lacroix insisted that 'To love France, one has to be French.'²⁶

Two Poles were executed after shots were fired from a building on rue de Tournon. They had been arrested and accused of having 'spread terror in the entire *quartier* of Luxembourg' during the Commune. After their execution, Count Czartoryski, president of the Polish Committee, complained; the 'incendiary tools' suspected by the Versaillais were, he insisted, simply lights for the Polish library on the street. One of the men had fought for the Commune, but the other, from Lithuania, had not – he ran the library and lived in the house. In any case, the role played by General Dombrowski in the Communard resistance helped fuel anger among Versaillais against the Poles. One officer, on hearing that prisoners brought before him were Polish, said, 'Well, they're Polish. That's enough right there.'²⁷

Contemporaries were virtually unanimous that the Communards about to be shot accepted their fate with heads held high. A Belgian journalist quoted soldiers who had been part of execution squads. One related that they had killed 'forty of this rabble' in Passy. They all died 'as soldiers',

proudly, with arms folded across their chest. Some even opened their uniforms and shouted, 'Go ahead and fire! We are not afraid of death.'²⁸

A Versailles official went out to have a look for himself. He saw prisoners under escort and, counting twenty-eight of them, recognised some men with whom he had fought during the Prussian siege. Almost all of them were workers. Their faces 'betrayed neither despair, nor despondence, nor emotion . . . they knew where they were being taken'. The Versaillais had not taken more than four steps when he heard the execution squad's volley. The twenty-eight 'insurgents' fell. What he heard made him dizzy. But what made it worse was the series of individual shots that followed, the *coups de grâce*. He ran in the other direction, but 'around me, the crowd seemed impassable'. Parisians were now used to it.

Even if the Communards died 'as soldiers', they were certainly not afforded the rights soldiers and even prisoners were owed according to international conventions. The Communard Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray came across young sailors in a bar on place Voltaire. He asked them, rather coyly, if there had been many dead among the 'enemy'. 'Ah', replied one of them, 'we were given orders by the general to take no prisoners.' Young soldiers from the provinces were pushed by officers to kill anyone who had fought for the Commune. Versaillais soldiers with rural origins who might have resisted such an order had been inundated with anti-Parisian propaganda claiming that Parisians were evil, scoundrels, liars, thieves and degenerates who had turned their back on the Church.

Little more than two months earlier, line troops taken prisoner by the insurgents on Montmartre had been well treated. Now, thousands of Communards taken prisoner by the Versaillais were gunned down. A few men were shot because they had the misfortune of somewhat resembling a prominent figure from the Commune. Such was the case of a shoemaker called Constant who lived in the bourgeois *quartier* of Gros-Caillou in the Seventh Arrondissement. He resembled the painter Alfred-Édouard Billioray, a member of the Commune. A certain Martin, taken to be Jules Vallès, was killed near Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, while a crowd roared its approval.²⁹

The Versaillais discourse openly encouraged the policy of killing Communards, comparing the insurgents and those who supported them with brigands or wild animals, thus dehumanising them and justifying mass executions. Watching the lugubrious procession of prisoners on the way to Versailles, Augustine Blanchecotte castigated 'these wild beasts, savage, raging . . . these are monsters who should be classified by zoologists. These are not men.' According to *Figaro*, 'One cannot have any

illusions. More than 50,000 insurgents remain in Paris . . . What is a republican? A wild animal.'³⁰

Théophile Gautier agreed: 'In all the great cities there are lion pits, caverns closed with thick bars where all the wild beasts, smelly animals, venomous snakes and all the perverted resisters who civilisation could not tame are to be found; those who love blood and adore fire as one does holiday fireworks, all those delighted by theft, those for whom attacks on decency represent love, all those who are monsters to the core, all those with deformities of the soul, a filthy population, unknown to this day, who swarm ominously in the depths of underground darkness.' One day, he went on, a guard loses the keys to the zoo 'and the ferocious animals scatter throughout the terrified city with terrifying savage shrieks. Their cages now open, the hyenas of 1793 and the gorillas of the Commune rush out.'³¹

Female Commune prisoners resembled, for Gautier, 'the bearded and moustached sorcerers of Shakespeare, a hideous variety of hermaphrodite, formed by ugliness drawn from both sexes'. He mocked 'the horrible, inextinguishable, burning thirst of these scoundrels, infected by alcohol, combat, their journey, intense heat, the fever of intense situations and the torment of their coming death . . . crying out with husky and hoarse voices now lubricated only by saliva: "Water! Water! Water!"'³²

Henri Oppen de Blowitz, a German journalist who after becoming naturalised worked for Thiers, visited a Versailles prison during the Commune. He became obsessed with a young woman he observed from a safe distance beyond the fence, describing what he saw as if he had returned from visiting a zoo. She was 'one of the most beautiful women' he had ever beheld: 'Her long black tresses fell over her bare shoulders, and as she had torn her dress to shreds, not to wear the clothes of the 'accursed Versaillaise', one could see her naked body through the rents. She was tall and graceful, and on the approach of visitors she reared her head proudly, like a horse about to neigh . . . her bright eyes glisten[ed]; a blush tint took over her face. She compressed her lips, ground her teeth, and burst into a shrill, defiant, vindictive laugh when she recognised the officer of the prison who accompanied us.' In the final hours of the Commune, the young woman had apparently fought alongside her lover. When he was killed, or so the Versaillais story went, she attacked a Versaillais officer and 'furiously stabbed him, plunging her weapon again and again into her victim. Before she could be removed from his body, she had cut, bitten and torn it with all the fury of a hyena.' The young woman had been taken to Versailles covered with blood and 'she had to be bound and gagged before she would allow the blood to be washed off. Hideous!'³³

Maxime Du Camp, writer and friend of Gustave Flaubert, nuanced this biological discourse. The Commune, he explained, had been caused by 'furious envy and social epilepsy'. It reflected conditions that had always existed, 'a Manichean struggle between Good and Evil, civilisation and barbarism, order against anarchy, and intelligence opposed to stupidity . . . work and finally the very idea of the elite of society against the jumble of all that is evil, perverse and bestial'.

Women were particularly suspect in these accounts. *Le Gaulois* quoted a doctor, who insisted that the female incendiaries were acting: 'under the epidemic influence of the incendiary mania . . . their brain is weaker and their sensibility more lively. They also are one hundred times more dangerous, and they have caused without any doubt much more evil.' Some accounts emphasised that 'female incendiaries', as well as other female insurgents, wore men's clothing, such as parts of National Guard uniforms. The point of such descriptions was to point out how unnatural, and thus subversive, they appeared to them.³⁴

A bourgeois who visited the Chantiers prison distinguished between women who had 'an honest and proper appearance' and others whose rags and wild hair were taken to indicate 'their moral state and social position'. Journalists and curious bourgeois seemed obsessed with the physical appearance of women, particularly when it came to unflattering characteristics.³⁵

Louise Lacroix stared at the female prisoners. Some, who were clearly workers, 'dressed modestly', and some very young ones who had probably spent their childhoods in workshops or factories seemed old before their time. In her view, these were not the women 'who would be going out preaching insanities on the rights of women'. At the head of this particular group strode 'a large creature, about forty or forty-five years of age, with two large headbands'. To the hostile onlooker, the woman seemed more masculine than feminine, with robust arms. Next to her was a small, pale, blonde woman, about eighteen to twenty years of age, 'slender, gracious' in a skirt of grey silk who had to walk rapidly to keep up. On her right cheek, black gunpowder and strands of hair partially covered a smear of blood. Lacroix had certainly never before seen 'women marching with such determination towards certain death'. A tall brown-haired woman raised her arms above her head and shouted in a voice both calm and convincing, 'They killed my man and I avenged him. I die content. Long live the Commune!'³⁶

The widespread belief among the Versaillais that the Commune had in part been the work of 'uppity' and 'unnatural' women may help explain the

brutal treatment some women faced after being arrested. Rapes were reported in the First, Eighth and Ninth Arrondissements. Georges Jeanneret saw women 'being treated almost like the poor Arabs of an insurgent tribe: after they had killed them, they stripped them, while they were still in their death throes, of part of their clothing. Sometimes they went even further, as at the foot of the faubourg Montmartre and in the place Vendôme, where women were left naked and defiled on the pavements.' Versailles soldiers ripped away the blouses of women and corpses to reveal their breasts, to the amusement of hostile onlookers. In one instance, troops killed with bayonets a young woman about eighteen to twenty years of age, then they removed all her clothes, 'cynically tossing her beautiful body, still throbbing, in the corner of the street, after having odiously insulted all of her charms'.³⁷ Undressing served as the kind of humiliation some believed was required to put things back in their proper order. The fury of upper-class onlookers, particularly women, towards women assumed to be female insurgents reflected a desire to point out the potential danger of women forgetting their place.

Versillais newspapers shouted for more vengeance to clean the contagious Communard stain from the city. *Le Figaro* demanded a complete purge of Paris: 'Never has such an opportunity presented itself to cure Paris of the moral gangrene which has eaten away at it for the last twenty years . . . Today clemency would be completely crazy . . . Let's go, *honnêtes gens*! Help us finish with the democratic and socialist vermin.' Goncourt compared the repression to a therapeutic bloodletting. *Le Bien public* called for a 'hunt for the Communards', and that was what it got. The *Journal des Débats* reasoned that the army had now 'avenged its incalculable disasters [in the Franco-Prussian War] by a victory'. *Le Figaro* saluted the 'General enterprise of sweeping Paris clean'. All the guilty 'should be executed'. Similar calls came from overseas. The *New York Herald* advised 'no cessation of summary judgment and summary execution . . . Root them out, destroy them utterly, M. Thiers, if you would save France. No mistaken humanity.'³⁸

The goal now was to protect and restore Paris so that it might once again be deserving of the *honnêtes gens* who had once flourished there. 'Honesty' became the word of the day. *La Patrie*, for one, made it clear that if Paris 'wants to conserve its privilege of being the rendez-vous of the honest and fashionable *beau monde*, it owes it to itself and to its invited visitors a security that nothing can trouble . . . Examples are indispensable, a fatal necessity, but a necessity.' Marshal Patrice MacMahon pointed out that, now that the Commune had been crushed, he could finally 'address

[himself] to the honest population of Paris', by which he meant the upper classes on whose behalf Versaillais forces were carrying out the massacre.³⁹ Those who had supported the Commune had no illusions about Paris's future, knowing full well that Thiers, along with his army and his government, would purge the city of any traces of the Commune or its ideals. When Henri Rochefort arrived in a convoy of prisoners in Versailles, a man 'in a cinnamon coloured frock coat . . . waving a beautiful red umbrella, shouted at the top of his lungs: "It's Rochefort! He must be skinned alive!"' Rochefort had to stifle a laugh – the man was indeed 'the type of ferocious bourgeois such as Daumier painted for us'. Jules Simon identified civilisation with the power of the bourgeoisie: 'One overturns aristocracy, which is a privilege . . . One does not overturn the bourgeoisie, one attains it.' Pierre Vésinier, a journalist and Communard who survived, assessed: 'The victorious bourgeoisie showed neither pity nor mercy. It had sworn to annihilate the revolutionary and socialist proletariat for ever – to drown it in its own blood. Never had a better occasion presented itself; and it profited by it with ferocious joy.'

It was clear, too, that Thiers's bloody repression was not only intended to destroy the Commune, but was also meant to prevent the possibility of any future revolution in France. On 31 May, Goncourt concluded: 'It is good that there was neither conciliation nor bargain. The solution was brutal. It was by pure force . . . The solution has restored confidence to the army, which learned in the blood of the Communards that it was still able to fight. Finally, the bloodletting was a bleeding white; such a purge, by killing off the combative part of the population, defers the next revolution by a whole generation.'⁴⁰

For his part, Jules Ferry was not shocked by 'the reprisals taken by vengeful soldiers, the peasant in good order dishing out punishment . . . I saw these things and accepted them as if I beheld the sword of the Archangel at work.' The journalist Francisque Sarcey insisted that no compromise was possible: 'If the scaffold is ever to be done away with, it should be kept for those who build barricades.' The *honnêtes gens* counted on the *conseils de guerre* to finish the work.

The murderous discourse of 'delivered' elites during and after Bloody Week propounded the belief that the march of Versaillais 'justice' following 'the red orgy' would 'purify' French society – a concept, of course, with considerable bloody resonance in the twentieth century. After Bloody Week, the *honnêtes gens* were willing to go to great lengths to purify the city, even if it meant even more mass executions. Sébastien Commissaire remembered hearing groups talking on boulevards Montmartre and des

Italiens: 'The capital must be purged. Paris needs a good bleeding. We have to get rid of 50,000 men . . . There are some who say 100,000.' A policeman in Auteuil did not mince words either: 'the soldiers of Versailles are saying . . . that they will spare no one, not women, not children, not old people, given that they are nothing more than Parisian scum and that France must get rid of them'.⁴¹

Some elites were even willing to destroy Paris itself – in order to save it, of course. Louis Enault, obsessed with the fires that had devastated parts of Paris, took the image of purification through fire to justify the repression: 'They say that flames purify! Oh! If this is the case, on the funerary pyre of Paris, let's throw all those who have cost us, all those among us who are scoundrels and evil, and all those who have brought about this dire debasement of our national character! Yes! . . . and then we will soon see our France, just like the phoenix of the old fable, be reborn out of the ashes that will still be warm.'⁴² Enault and others imagined that the restored Paris would be much like the one that had existed before the Commune, with the monumental public buildings that had been burnt rebuilt. But Paris would be without any hint of the revolutionary ideas that had given rise to the Commune in the first place. In the name of muscular religion, one could not strike hard enough. Eugène Hennebert, for one, demanded the banning of 'this unhealthy literature that begins with *Les Misérables* of Monsieur Hugo'. Theatres where performances 'fall into the mud' should be shut down, as well as 'innumerable cafés, drinking places or shady bars that have given us the reputation as a people of drunks and imbeciles'. 'Triumphant' atheism had to be destroyed, too, and religion would be the order of the day once more. In other words, as Élie Reclus noted wryly, 'order, family, property again reign' – and would for the foreseeable future.⁴³

Remembering

Le cadavre est à terre, et l'idée est debout

(The corpse lies on the ground, the idea still stands)

Victor Hugo¹

Little by little, Paris returned to normal, at least for people of means. The Parisian upper classes returned in style to proudly stroll the grand boulevards of their capital, thrilled with the victory of Versailles. A journalist described the scene on 28 May: 'Along the towing path along the Seine fifty bodies of insurgents were stretched out.' Workers were digging through the pavement to bury them, while 'a large crowd looked on indifferently' including 'young, elegant and radiant girls showing off their springtime umbrellas in the sunshine'. For them, the good life began again. Yet, with decomposing bodies still strewn about, calls for getting rid of the remaining corpses in the streets of Paris came fast and furious. One could not have 'these scoundrels who have done so much evil' cause more harm after their death.² Such a sight could keep tourists away. The gates of the city were reopened on 6 June, although police inspected the papers of all travellers. Barricades slowly disappeared as shops reopened. Pavements that had been covered with bodies and blood were cleared and cleaned.

Yet Paris was a city in ruins, the result of Versaillais shelling and seven days of pitched battles, however one-sided. Only gutted shells of the Tuileries Palace, the Ministry of Finance and the Hôtel de Ville remained. Other monumental buildings such as Palais-Royal, the Palace of Justice, and the Louvre had been badly damaged, the Grenier de l'Abondance and the docks of La Villette destroyed. Along the Champs-Élysées and in

other parts of western Paris, hundreds of houses were in ruins. The rue Royale, rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré, rue de Bac and rue de Lille were lined with burnt-out buildings, as were considerably less fancy streets in Montmartre and Belleville. Countless buildings still standing intact had been riddled with shells and bullets. The shattered remnants of the Victory Column still stretched across place Vendôme. Rubble from barricades lay about most everywhere in central and eastern Paris, particularly Montmartre and Belleville. The City of Light had become the City of Blood, innumerable traces of which could not be easily effaced. However, almost immediately following the fall of the Commune, Thomas Cook in London organised trips to view the ruins of the French capital. Tourists could again 'circulate joyously in the elegant Paris of pleasures'.³

The Commune had been crushed, but public mourning for its bloody demise never occurred. *Te Deums* echoed in the churches of Paris, not for the thousands of dead Parisians, but for the city's archbishop. Georges Darboy's body was exhibited in the chapel of the archbishop's palace for ten days, while streams of well-heeled Parisians passed by. Arriving at the Gare de Montparnasse for the funeral on 7 June, Vicomte Camille de Meaux, a member of the National Assembly, came upon yet another convoy of prisoners being taken to Versailles. He would never forget the angry, proud looks directed at those observing them, expressing a confidence that revenge would one day come. Even around Notre-Dame, the population seemed hostile. Meaux expressed surprise that anti-Communards were not greeted as liberators.⁴

The oration by the priest Adolphe Perraud would have seemed strange to the late archbishop, describing the 'Holy Martyr of la Roquette' as the most 'universally loved archbishop who ever served in Paris'. In fact, as the eulogy noted, Darboy had endured the constant opposition of those Perraud referred to as 'demagogues, Legitimists, ultra-papists'. Once he had been buried in Notre-Dame in all solemnity, attacks on Archbishop Darboy by Ultramontanes, those unconditionally loyal to the Vatican and thus determined enemies of French Gallicans, began again.⁵

Karl Marx was among those to insist that Adolphe Thiers was 'the real murderer of Archbishop Darboy'. The head of the Versailles government may well have assumed that the Communards would not dare shoot the archbishop, but he had been willing to take that risk. If anything, the execution of Darboy strengthened Thiers's position in orchestrating a vigorous repression. Wickham Hoffman, American Ambassador Elijah B.

Washburne's assistant, concluded that, if Darboy had not been a Gallican, the extreme Right of the Assembly would 'have exerted themselves that his life would have been saved'.⁶

The Catholic Church wasted no time in trying to reassert itself in France after the Commune, using Darboy's death to promote a more conservative brand of Catholicism. On 18 June, Pius IX denounced Catholic liberalism, after evoking the martyrdom of Georges Darboy at the hands of 'the Commune and its men escaped from Hell'. Masses were celebrated as an expiation or even exorcism of the Communards. A marble plaque went up at La Roquette in honour of Darboy and the other hostages killed there; the following year a pilgrimage was made to the place on rue Haxo where other hostages had been killed, a church also soon being built there.⁷

In 1875, the Church began constructing a more permanent monument: the basilica of Sacré-Coeur on Montmartre, near the spot where Eugène Varlin was battered and then shot to death. It stood as a symbol of penance – for France must have sinned to have suffered such a crushing defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and then an uprising by its own people. Sacré-Coeur represented the close ties between the Church, which still anticipated a monarchical restoration, and the conservative Republic that followed the Commune's defeat. It became an object of passionate hatred to men and women of the political left.⁸ The Church, ironically, lost even more ground with ordinary people, who did not fill the pews of the new houses of worship being built in working-class districts on the margins of urban life.

The Ministry of War disbanded the Volunteers of the Seine, who had returned to Versailles. But first they were celebrated for their service: a banquet and a triumphant review at Longchamps on 29 June in the presence of Thiers, still carrying the title of 'chief of executive power of the French Republic', marked the end of the force. Albert Hans proudly believed that he and his colleagues had done their duty 'under the eyes of an enemy which watched us agonise with a cruel joy'. The Volunteers' losses had amounted to a few killed, including Gustave Durieu, the murderous battalion commander, with about another ten wounded.⁹

Hans had been eager for war against the Prussians and confident of a French victory. Now, in the wake of the Commune, he promised to fight again 'for the national and conservative cause' against 'the turbulent masses' if revolutionaries dared rise up again. He would eagerly await the day when Metz could be retaken from 'our implacable enemies' across the

Rhine. The victory of the Versailles forces, he believed, had restored 'our national dignity'. For Hans, '*la patrie* is divinity'.¹⁰

Thiers and the Versaillais were surprised and angered by growing hostile international reaction to the repression. A Geneva newspaper denounced the massacres carried out in Paris. If so many bodies were necessary for 'the reign of order', it argued, then 'the civilised world will collapse even more rapidly'. Other foreign newspapers began to describe Parisian workers as 'martyrs'. In London, *The Times*, kept well informed throughout by its correspondents in Paris, concluded that 'the laws of war are soft and Christian when compared with the inhuman laws of vengeance by which the soldiers of Versailles shot, stabbed with bayonets, and ripped open the bodies of men, women and children taken prisoner over the past six days. History has never seen anything like this before.'¹¹

Executions continued at least until 7 June in Satory, the Bois-de-Boulogne and the prison of Cherche-Midi. In Père Lachaise, workers rushed to clean up, carrying away debris and signs of what had happened, but there were so many corpses they could only pile them up. Bodies had to be taken from the streets, however much Thiers might have preferred that they remain there as a warning, rather like the gallows that stood near Russian manor houses in the age of serfdom. In the Palais-Royal, bodies of women remained for days in the garden and under the arches of the structure. Decomposing corpses created a horrendous stench that permeated the air.¹²

The Versaillais attempted to cover up some mass graves to make it appear that fewer Communards had died. A Parisian newspaper published an official decree forbidding people from going into the Bois-de-Boulogne because there the killing went on. The notice ended with: 'Whenever the number of condemned exceeds ten men, the execution squad will be replaced by a machine gun' in the interest of efficiency. On 16 June, the *Journal Officiel* announced that any newspaper that republished the chilling decree would be prosecuted. But it did not deny its authenticity.¹³

Thiers, whom Henri Rochefort called a 'Sanguinary Tom Thumb', triumphantly wrote to France's prefects about the Communards, 'The ground is covered with their cadavers; this awful sight will serve as a lesson.' Élie Reclus noted that the verb 'to shoot' had become 'the core of our language: "we shoot, he was shot, we will be shot"'. The word had become 'the great word of order in French society'. The Communards may have been mortal, but their cause was not.¹⁴

*

The Versailles government did not content itself with arresting Communards in Paris. It also sent out orders to departmental prefects calling for the arrest of Communards who had managed to get out of Paris alive. Several *départements* were placed in a state of siege. About 1,500 of those accused of being Communards managed to get to Belgium, many of them ordinary labourers, 2,000–3,000 to Switzerland, about 500 to England, and a few to Spain, the Netherlands or South America. Most would live in abject poverty. Communard leaders were far more likely to escape than the rank and file because of their connections and travel experience. Here, too, the poorest Parisians were at a disadvantage, as they were in the repression and bloodletting. Léo Frankel escaped, thanks to a coach driver who got him out disguised as a cabinetmaker. He and Elizabeth Dmitrieff reached Switzerland disguised as a Prussian couple, as both spoke German well. Returning to Russia, Elizabeth took up the cause of revolution and married the administrator of her legal husband's estate (her first marriage being one of convenience). When he was arrested and sent to Siberia, she followed him, never learning of her amnesty in 1879 after the Third Republic had been well established. She died in Siberia in 1910.¹⁵

The French government even pressured authorities in Britain, Spain, Belgium and Switzerland to arrest and extradite those who had participated in the Commune. From Belgium, Victor Hugo, who had at first been against the Commune, now outraged Thiers and his entourage by attacking the Belgian government for its compliance with Thiers's directives. He denounced the execution by the Versaillais of Raoul Rigault and others without trial. Expelled from Belgium on 30 May because of his condemnation of its government, Hugo found refuge in the Netherlands.¹⁶

In July 1870, Sutter-Laumann's Communard past began to catch up with him. Technically he was a deserter, at least from the point of view of the Versaillais, because he had fought in the Franco-Prussian War. An officer who had been attached to the *mairie* of the Eighteenth Arrondissement where he had worked took him aside, telling him that it was time for him to leave Paris. The officer wrote a letter recommending him for paid service as a guard on one of the pontoons full of Communard prisoners who had been sentenced to remain in captivity there or be sent to prison in Cayenne or some other distant, tropical place. He went to Cherbourg, ironically guarding some of those with whom he had fought. For the rest of his life, Sutter-Laumann, who became a writer, poet and critic, had nightmares about the horrors of Bloody Week.¹⁷

As the Versaillais drew closer and shells began to fall near his atelier, Gustave Courbet had accepted the invitation of Demoiselle Girard, later described by the police as his mistress. She offered the painter a room in her apartment on the third floor at 14, passage du Saumon, and space in her basement for thirty-five paintings. Courbet had incurred great wrath among anti-Communards; newspapers invariably referred to him as 'the dismantler' of the Vendôme Column. Eugène Delessert went so far as to say that he wanted to see the painter – 'this Prussian vandal!' – shot.¹⁸

Police pillaged Courbet's atelier on rue d'Hautefeuille. The painter had already lost two ateliers, one in Ornans at the time of the Prussian invasion, and another at pont d'Alma. Rumours circulated as to Courbet's whereabouts. *Paris-Journal* claimed he had been discovered hiding in the ministry of the navy, having stuffed 'his *grosse personne*' into a closet, and, when he resisted, a soldier had purportedly blown him apart with a rifle.¹⁹

Shortly before Bloody Week began, Courbet, aware that he was a wanted man, made a surprise visit to Arsène Lecomte, who made musical instruments and lived on rue Saint-Gilles in Le Marais. The two men had known each other for twenty years, though not well. Lecomte knew the painter had become involved in politics, but not much about his role in the Commune. The artist said that he feared falling into the hands of the Versaillais and asked if he could stay one night in his apartment while another was being prepared for him near Charenton. Lecomte's wife did not want him there, but Courbet simply showed up, carrying absolutely nothing with him. He hid there from 23 May to 7 June, when police raided the apartment at night.²⁰

Courbet had cut his hair and shaved off his recognisable beard. A policeman said that his Franc-Comtois accent gave him away. When he was taken to the Palace of Justice, another policeman asked him why he had associated with 'these bandits'. On 4 July, Courbet was imprisoned in Mazas. The municipal council of Ornans removed a statue he had done from a fountain in the square. One arm had been broken off.²¹

Standing before a court-martial on 15 August, Courbet was accused of trying to overthrow the government, inciting hatred, usurping public functions (for having served on the Commune), and for being responsible for the demolition of the Vendôme. Courbet contended that the Column obstructed circulation, and that he had opposed setting fire to the Palais-Royal and had helped preserve the Louvre's artistic treasures. He insisted that he had tried to use his reputation to bring the Commune towards

conciliation. That was not the way the Versailles government viewed it, but they could not really shoot the famous artist.

On 2 September, a military court-martial sentenced Courbet to six months in prison. In 1873, the government, presided over by Marshal MacMahon, condemned the painter to pay the cost of rebuilding the Vendôme Column and of his trial. Courbet left for exile in Switzerland. The government seized the artist's property, including paintings, in Paris and Ornans. The *maitre d'Ornans* passed away on the last day of 1877, just before his first payment was due.²²

Show trials like Courbet's were intended to reassure the upper classes about the efficiency of the repression. A lawyer called before a court-martial expressed outrage at what he had seen, 'men led like worthless livestock; chained, insulted by a cowardly and idiotic crowd'. He was proud to defend defeated Communards, who, for the most part, did nothing more than raise up a flag, 'that of Misery'.²³

In trials of suspected female incendiaries, 'moral' considerations – 'living in sin', children born out of wedlock, the lack of a 'good' family background, and so on – undoubtedly influenced the harshness of the sentences. The Versailles image of the militant female insurrectionary would linger on, and along with the 'drunken commoner' idea would influence the emergence of crowd psychology; crowds were described as having characteristics drawn from anti-Communard discourse, as individual identities were subsumed in and overwhelmed by irrational, emotional, flighty behaviour, the way female incendiaries supposedly behaved, or lurching irrationally like drunks.²⁴

During her trial, Louise Michel proudly faced the judges, telling them that, although she always dressed in black, she had never been without her red belt since the proclamation of the Republic on 4 September. Looking as severe as always, Michel denounced the execution of hostages, insisting that the Commune 'had had absolutely nothing to do with assassinations or burning'. Social revolution had been its goal. She flatly stated that she would 'have had no hesitation about shooting people who gave orders' to execute Communard prisoners, resolving at one point to assassinate Thiers. She was 'honoured to be singled out as one of the promoters of the Commune'. She swore 'by our martyrs who fell on the field of Satory' that if the judges did not condemn her to death, she would 'not stop crying for vengeance . . . If you are not cowards, then kill me.' The judges condemned her to deportation, but not to death, probably believing that her execution would make her a martyr. When asked at the court-martial if she had ever had an intimate relationship with a man – the goal apparently being to see

if she had been involved with Théophile Ferré – the ‘Red Virgin’ replied, ‘No, my only passion is the revolution.’²⁵

Disguised as a woman, Ferré had managed to avoid arrest for several days after the Commune fell, before being taken prisoner in a house on rue Montorgueil. He refused to answer interrogators’ questions and was condemned to death and shot that same day on the plain of Satory. Gustave Genton and Jean-Baptiste François were both condemned and shot there. The following summer, prisoners were still being dispatched at Satory. Communard General Louis Rossel was recognised in disguise on boulevard Saint-Germain on 7 June. He, too, was shot at Satory in November. Before dying, he wrote, ‘I shall never regret having tried to demolish that bastard oligarchy, the French bourgeoisie.’ On 29 June 1872, in a perfect display of show trials at work, a court-martial sentenced Raoul Rigault to death, although he had actually been executed thirteen months earlier. Another court-martial in November sentenced Eugène Varlin to death, although he, too, had already been brutally killed eighteen months before.²⁶

The official government inquest into the Commune predictably blamed socialists (and specifically the International), anarchists and the weakening of the influence of the Church for the ‘moral disorder’ of the Commune. It exuded conservative hostility to Paris, noting that immigration brought together masses of people ready for revolution and suggesting that the city should cease to be the capital of France. Paris would not again have the right to have a mayor for over a century, until 1977. The government dissolved the National Guard and the next year banned the International. Thiers insisted that the strength of France was inseparable from ‘a nation that believes’ in God. The government report saluted the repression as ‘a painful necessity. Society is obliged to defend itself.’ But this was not enough. France had to ‘again rejoin the path of civilisation’. The elimination of the ‘unhealthy’ parts of society had an important role in this effort. A massacre was a good start.²⁷

Between the end of the Commune and 1873, some 300 books appeared that supported the official version of events. These accounts saluted the Versaillais victory and castigated the ‘Vandals’ and ‘barbarians’ of the Commune; Théophile Gautier, Alphonse Daudet and other literary figures published their attacks on the Communards. The Versaillais interpretation of the Commune, seeking to justify the bloody repression, remained dominant through the time of the ‘Republic of Moral Order’, which lasted until 1877. Twenty-one years later, an anti-Semitic priest, horrified by the advent to power in France of people who had once

supported the Commune, argued that the repression in 1871 had been 'perhaps still too mild!'²⁸

It is not surprising that the government account became the predominant one in the years immediately following the Commune during the conservative 'Republic of the Moral Order'. In fact, Communards were still being persecuted: twenty-four military courts continued to meet, some as late as four years after the Commune fell. In all, an official government report noted 36,309 arrests and 10,137 condemnations, including those sent to New Caledonia, the French penal colony in the south-west Pacific Ocean. 'Deserters' – that is, former soldiers who fought with the Commune who had not already been shot – faced particularly harsh sentences. Again, specific *quartiers* identified with the left were targeted; military courts condemned to deportation more than 700 Communards who lived in Montmartre. Many more than that were shot or simply disappeared.²⁹

Thousands of prisoners endured long, miserable trips in animal wagons to fort and ship prisons and pontoons – floating prisons – at Brest, La Rochelle, Rochefort, Cherbourg, Oléron, Lorient or Ile-de-Ré. Prisoners received only a piece of bread to eat and water from two tin cans, and no opportunity 'to get down in order to take care of the most legitimate need!' This was better than being gunned down, but prisoners still suffered greatly, and not all believed they were lucky. A song the prisoners sang included the line: 'Prison is worse than death.'³⁰

Louise Michel and Nathalie Le Mel were among more than 4,500 people deported to the South Seas. After two years of incarceration in prison, they were transported in August 1873 from Paris to Rochefort, where they boarded the *Virginie* to be kept in steel cages, along with as many as 150 prisoners, who had neither natural light nor fresh air, and were weighted down by a suffocating tropical humidity. Some of the prisoners had small children, including one child born in the Versailles prison of Les Chantiers. The prisoners received little in the way of rations and were limited to a litre of water per day. Le Mel was among those violently ill on the long voyage to Hell. Michel penned poetry describing the awful trip of more than five months.

Finally, the *Virginie* arrived in the Bay of Nouméa, which had, like Rome, Michel noted with irony, seven bluish hills. Those prisoners condemned to forced labour were taken to the island of Noua four kilometres away, where they suffered from exhausting work and punishments inflicted by brutal guards. Louise Michel was taken with a group of prisoners who had been condemned to deportation within a fortified compound

to the island of Ducos, six miles from Tomo, New Caledonia. Guards made the conditions of the prisoners even worse, depriving them of bread and inflicting other calculated cruelties upon them. There they did the best they could, digging small gardens and building a small school. They were forced to survive without a doctor and lacked even the most basic medications and bandages to care for wounds and injuries. By the end of 1873, forty of them had died.³¹

Michel's complaints about the conditions and relating the suffering of Le Mel brought no improvement. She took the side of the Kanaks, the indigenous people of New Caledonia, who rebelled against French rule in 1878. A year later Michel won the right to move to Nouméa, the capital of the largest island, and teach the children of prisoners there. During her seven years in New Caledonia, Michel, having seen the repressive might of the French state up close in France and in New Caledonia, became an anarchist.

The number of Communards who perished at the hands of Versaillais forces is still a matter of debate.³² Conservative accounts accuse the Communards of mass murder, estimating that 66 or perhaps 68 hostages had been killed. The Versaillais, on the other hand, summarily executed without any real trial as many as 17,000 people, a figure given by the official government report that followed. The municipal council paid for that number of burials after Bloody Week. But some estimates have reached as high as 35,000.

Bodies were left in vacant lots, piled into immense ditches, construction sites, and abandoned or torched buildings, tossed into the Seine or into mass graves, including those at the Square Saint-Jacques, near the Caserne Lobau, or beyond the city walls. Thousands of bodies simply disappeared, covered with lime, burnt or disposed of in other ways, for example hauled to cemeteries outside of Paris, or buried at the gas factory. Others ended up in the cemeteries of Montparnasse, Montmartre, or Père Lachaise. Many bodies were burnt, as at Buttes-Chaumont. More than 1,500 corpses were buried in the Nineteenth Arrondissement. Montmartre, along with Belleville, was prominent among *quartiers* specifically targeted because of its identification with Commune militancy – at least 2,000 people were killed in the Twentieth Arrondissement alone.³³

When newspapers asked to publish lists of those executed on the orders of *prévôtal* courts, they were told that this was not possible because these instant courts-martial kept no records. Many people simply disappeared, nameless victims. When the bodies of Communards who had been shot

could be identified, authorities refused to allow their families to place flowers or anything else on their graves for four months.³⁴

A subsequent survey carried out by members of the municipal council of Paris concluded improbably that more than 100,000 workers had been killed, held prisoner, or taken flight. The estimate may have been much too high, but the working class of Paris was inarguably depleted. Comparing the 1872 census with that of 1866, half of the 24,000 shoemakers were not to be found, nor were 10,000 of 30,000 tailors, 6,000 of 20,000 cabinet-makers and 1,500 of 8,500 bronze workers, with only somewhat less striking figures among plumbers and roofers, and other trades from which militant Communards were drawn. Well after the Commune, industrialists and small employers complained about the paucity of artisans and skilled workers.³⁵

Maxime Vuillaume got it right when trying to assess the number of those massacred by the Versaillais, asking, 'Who will ever know?' Louise Michel wondered, 'But how many were there that we know nothing of? From time to time, the earth disgorges its corpses.' Paris had become 'an immense slaughterhouse and . . . we will never know the names nor the number of victims.'³⁶ This remains true today.

Soon after the crushing of the Commune, class hatred intensified. The social question came to dominate politics in France and in other countries, and contemporaries attributed this to the short-lived Paris Commune. From London Karl Marx concluded that the Paris Commune was not the anticipated social revolution that would free the proletariat. That, he insisted, would come. Yet workers had risen up spontaneously, so he was reassured. Lenin would add the leadership of the avant-garde of the proletariat, ultimately the Bolsheviks, thus turning away from an emphasis on the revolutionary spontaneity of workers. For his part, the British positivist Frederic Harrison, writing just after the Commune had fallen, concluded that, for the first time in modern European history, 'the workmen of the chief city of the Continent have organised a regular government in the name of a new social order', in opposition to the rich and powerful who benefited from state centralisation to consolidate 'vast and ever-increasing hoards of wealth, opening to the wealthy enchanted realms of idleness, luxury and waste – laying on the labourer, generation after generation, increasing burdens of toil, destitution and despair'. To Jean Allemane, the massacres during Bloody Week sadly demonstrated 'that the bourgeois soul contains egotism and cold cruelty'. A short history of the Commune published after its demise noted that

for the victorious bourgeoisie, 'extermination' had been 'the only word with them'. British authors argued that history would ultimately salute the overall humanity of the Communards, which still today seems true enough. For sixty-four days, ordinary Parisians had been 'masters of their own destinies'.³⁷ But their dream was not to be.

Thiers had managed to destroy the Commune. But the massacre perpetrated by Thiers's troops during and after Bloody Week would cast a long shadow over the following century. Despite the execution of hostages and the massacres of the Dominicans – totalling about 66 or 68 – these tragedies perpetrated by the Communards pale in comparison with the approximately 12,000–15,000 executions carried out by the Army of Versailles. Indeed the Communards were overall – despite their level of verbal violence – very careful to show they were not going to behave like the Versaillais. State violence was organised and systematic, as would be even more the case in the twentieth century.³⁸ For the '*hommes d'ordre*', as a Versaillais magistrate memorably thundered, 'In Paris, the whole population was guilty!' One could hear shouts of 'The brigands! We must exterminate them to the last one!' Another anti-Communard dreamed of 'an immense furnace in which we will cook each of them in turn'.³⁹ There would be nothing like the slaughter perpetrated by the Versaillais until the atrocities against the Armenians in 1915 during the First World War and such language would not be heard again until the Nazi genocide and other mass murders with victims chosen by race or ethnicity, including the tragic events in the Balkans during the 1990s towards the end of the cruel, bloody twentieth century.

Adolphe Thiers, whom the National Assembly named the first president of the Third Republic on 31 August 1871, got back most of his works of art that had been taken to the Tuileries, as well as a huge sum the government paid him for the loss of his house. Jules Ducatel, who had signalled to Versaillais troops on 21 May that no one was guarding the Point-du-Jour, received government honours. In 1877 he lost a job when accused of theft. Colonel Louis Vabre, who oversaw mass murder at the court-martial at Châtelet, was decorated with the *Legion d'honneur*.⁴⁰

Thiers died in 1873. Paris remained under martial law until early 1876. Workers' associations struggled in the repression that followed the Commune and only slowly revived. The Third French Republic survived the attempt by the monarchist President Marshal Patrice de MacMahon to bring about its destruction by parliamentary coup d'état, the so-called

Crisis of 16 May 1877. He dismissed the moderate republican Prime Minister Jules Simon, but the Chamber of Deputies refused to support the appointment of a prominent monarchist to head the new government. New elections brought a republican majority.

Gradually the Third French Republic took root in provincial France and statues celebrating it were inaugurated in villages squares. In Paris the place du Château d'eau became the place de la République, with a grand monument celebrating the new government. The Hôtel de Ville purchased one of Gustave Courbet's paintings. *La Marseillaise* became the French national anthem in 1879. A highly contested partial amnesty for Communards came in 1879, followed by a complete amnesty on 11 July 1880. Thousands of French men and women returned from exile and imprisonment in distant places, including many of those who had been condemned for years to impossibly harsh conditions in New Caledonia.⁴¹

That year, 14 July, Bastille Day, was celebrated as a national holiday for the first time. Thousands of people greeted Louise Michel at Gare Saint-Lazare when she returned to France in November 1880. The first French mass socialist parties took shape during the following two decades. French unions grew in strength following their legalisation in 1881. Gradually the dominance of the Versaillais discourse in the collective memory of the Paris Commune ebbed. With the rooting of the Third Republic, above all with the national elections of the early 1880s, the Commune gradually began to be seen as a founding moment, however contested, in its history.⁴² It has become a major, positive event in French national history.

But, even after these developments, there were still moments of bloody repression. On 1 May 1890, Louise Michel led the first demonstration of French workers on what became an international holiday. A year later, French troops gunned down demonstrators supporting a strike in the small northern working-class town of Fourmies. Ten people were killed, including four young women, the youngest sixteen years of age, and twenty-four people were wounded, including children. The '*rafle*', or police roundup of 'suspects', took shape in working-class neighbourhoods during the 1890s. By 1900 Paris was presented in guidebooks as 'pacified' and well policed – the 'forces of order' stood ready to intervene at any instant. The power of the centralised French state endured. It maintained its capacity for extreme violence, in France and in its colonies. If the Paris Commune of 1871 may be seen as the last of the nineteenth-century revolutions, the murderous, systematic state repression that followed helped

unleash the demons of the twentieth century. This is sadly perhaps a greater legacy of the Paris Commune than that of a movement for freedom undertaken by ordinary people.

The Wall of the *Fédérés* in Père Lachaise cemetery, where so many Communards were gunned down, emerged as the site of memory that symbolised the massacres of Bloody Week. The wall drew visitors on 14 July 1880, the first time that date could be celebrated as a national holiday under the Republic, some leaving commemorative wreaths. Gradually small crowds defied police by marching silently up to the wall, leading to confrontations. Eugène Pottier's revolutionary song *The Monument to the Fédérés* recalled what had occurred there, and in many other places in Paris: 'Here was the slaughterhouse, the charnel house. The victims rolled down from the corner of this wall into the great ditch below.' Police increasingly tolerated demonstrations at the wall on 1 May. A simple marble plaque went up in 1908: 'To the dead of the Commune, 21–28 May 1871.'

Today the Wall of the *Fédérés* remains a sombre, bracing monument to those massacred by the forces of 'the men of order'. Demonstrations there grew in size and intensity during the confrontations of May 1968 and again three years later on the centenary of the Commune. In 1983, the wall was classified as an historical monument, commemorating the ultimate victory of the French Republic for which the Communards fought.⁴³

The former Communard Jules Vallès dedicated his *L'Insurgé*, an autobiographical novel,

To all those,
Victims of social injustice,
Who take up arms against the evil in the world
And who formed,
Under the flag of the Commune,
A great federation of those who suffer.⁴⁴

Jean-Baptiste Clément, who managed to escape to Belgium and then London and was condemned to death by Versailles, had written *Le temps de cerises* in 1866. Parisians had sung it during both the Prussian and the Versaillais sieges. He now dedicated it 'to valiant Citizen Louise, the volunteer doctor's assistant of rue Fontaine-au-Roi, Sunday, 28 May 1871':

I will always love the time of the cherries.
I will keep this time, in my heart,
An open wound.⁴⁵

Le temps de cerises was now the good old days, when Parisians were free.⁴⁶

When I go up to the Wall of the Fédérés, as nightfall approaches, the leaves are falling, and all is still, I can almost hear the words of Thomas Wolfe: 'Oh lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.'⁴⁷

Notes

Prologue

1. Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848–1945*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1973), pp. 511; Roger Price, ‘Napoleon III’, in John Merriman and Jay Winter, eds., *Europe 1789 to 1914*, vol. 3 (Detroit, 2006), p. 1590.
2. Ted W. Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton, NJ, 1979); John M. Merriman, *Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1848–51* (New Haven, CT, 1978).
3. Theodore Zeldin, *The Political System of Napoleon III* (New York, 1958).
4. Geoffrey Warwo, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–71* (New York, 2003), p. 25; David Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York, 1995), p. 255; Jeanne Gaillard, *Paris, la ville 1852–1871* (1997), pp. 12–14, 135. Unless otherwise noted, all books cited were published in Paris.
5. Gaillard, *Paris*, p. 14.
6. Ibid., p. 191; Patrice Higonnet, *Paris: Capital of the World* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), pp. 180–1; Dominique Kalifa, *Les Bas-fonds: Histoire d’un imaginaire* (2013), p. 27, quoting Jules Janin, *L’Été à Paris* (1843) and *Mémoires de M. Claude* (1881–85), pp. 47, 52ff. See Louis Chevalier, *Dangerous Classes and Laboring Classes in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1973).
7. Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, pp. 7, 224, 259–60.
8. See Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, CA, 1999).
9. Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, p. 109.
10. Ibid., pp. 109–10, 188–9; Gaillard, *Paris*, pp. 537–53, 568–71.
11. Higonnet, *Paris*, pp. 174, 353.
12. Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago, 1995), pp. 71–2; see Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, Chapter 10 (‘Money’), pp. 227–45.
13. John Merriman, *Aux marges de la ville: faubourgs et banlieues en France 1815–1870* (1994), p. 292; Éric Fournier, *Paris en ruines: du Paris haussmannien au Paris communiste* (2008), pp. 22–6; John Merriman, *Police Stories* (New York, 2005); Gaillard, *Paris*, pp. 204–5, 568–71. Between 1852 and 1859, 4,349 houses were destroyed, 13 per cent of old Paris. Families forced from their apartments received little more than the equivalent of a few pounds by virtue of a law in 1841 and an imperial decree in 1852.

14. Higonnet, *Paris*, pp. 196–7, 250–52, 268; Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).
15. Jacques Hillairet, ed., *Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1979).
16. Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (New York, 1970), p. 59.
17. Gaillard, *Paris*, pp. 41–4, 61, 393–9; Jordan, *Transforming Paris*, pp. 206–7; Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (New York, 1999), p. 24.
18. Georges Duveau, *La Vie ouvrière sous le Second Empire* (1946), p. 203; Gaillard, *Paris*, p. 47; Merriman, *Aux marges de la ville*, p. 280.
19. John Merriman, *The Margins of City Life: Explorations on the French Urban Frontier, 1815–1851* (New York, 1991), p. 76.
20. Jacques Rougerie, *Paris Libre 1871* (1971), p. 19; Merriman, *Aux marges de la ville*, pp. 301–3.
21. Louis Lazare, *Les Quartiers de l'est de Paris et les Communes suburbaines* (1870), pp. 102, 243.
22. Higonnet, *Paris*, p. 91.
23. Olivier Marion, 'La vie religieuse pendant la Commune de 1871' (unpublished master's thesis, Paris-X Nanterre, 1981), pp. 20–2; Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy (1813–1871)* (2011), pp. 77–80; Charles Chauvin, *Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris, otage de la Commune (1813–1871)* (2011), p. 86. The Church would later classify as a 'missionary' area any place in which less than 20 per cent of the population fulfilled their Easter obligations.
24. Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy*, p. 82; S. Sakharov, *Lettres au Père Duchêne pendant la Commune de Paris* (1934), p. 18; Marion, 'La vie religieuse', pp. 23–6; S. Froumov, *La Commune de Paris et la démocratisation de l'école* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 30–1, 86–90; Carolyn Eichner, "We Must Shoot the Priests": Revolutionary Women and Anti-Clericalism in the Paris Commune of 1871', in Lucia Carle and Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, *Cities Under Siege/Situazioni d'Assedio/États de Siège* (Florence, 2002), pp. 267–8.
25. Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communards* (1964), p. 33; Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 12–13. See Duveau, *La vie ouvrière*.
26. Eichner, "We Must Shoot the Priests", p. 269.
27. Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2010), pp. 16–18.
28. Luc Willette, *Raoul Rigault, 25 ans, Communard, chef de police* (1984), p. 121; Gaston Da Costa, *Mémoires d'un Communard: la Commune vécue* (2009), p. 256; Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 38.
29. Maxime Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (1971), pp. 219–22; Auguste Lepage, *Les cafés artistiques et littéraires de Paris* (1882), p. 79; Pierre Courthion, *Courbet raconté par lui-même et par ses amis*, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1948), p. 249.
30. Robert Boudry, 'Courbet et la fédération des artistes', *Europe* 29: 64–5 (April–May 1951), p. 122; Ernest A. Vizetelly, *My Adventures in the Commune* (n.p., 2009 [1914]), p. 55; Denis Arthur Bingham, *Recollections of Paris*, vol. 2 (London, 1896), p. 117.
31. Boudry, 'Courbet et la fédération des artistes', pp. 122–3.
32. Archives of the Prefecture of Police (hereafter APP), Ba 1020, reports of 27 June and 4 July 1870; Jean Périquier, *La Commune et les artistes: Pottier, Courbet, Vallès, J.B. Clément* (1980), pp. 59–61.
33. Frederic Harrison, 'The Revolution and the Commune', *Fortnightly Review* 53:9 (May 1871), p. 563; Alain Dalotel, Alain Faure and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, *Aux origines de la Commune: le mouvement des réunions publics à Paris, 1868–70* (1980), pp. 295–6; S. Hollis Clayson, *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life Under Siege (1870–71)* (Chicago, 2002), p. 190; Gould, *Insurgent Identities*, pp. 123–31. Legitimists, who wanted a restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, shared republican and socialist rejection of imperial centralised authoritarianism.
34. Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges*, pp. 189–90.
35. Archives de la Défense, 8J 3e conseil de guerre 3 dossier 554 (all subsequent 8J dossiers are from these archives in Vincennes); APP, Ba 892. Willette, *Raoul Rigault*,

- pp. 13–16, 21–8, 32–6; Charles Prolès, *Raoul Rigault: La préfecture de police sous La Commune, les otages* (1989), pp. 11–15; Jules Forni, *Raoul Rigault, procureur de la Commune* (1871), pp. 3–13; Auguste Lepage, *Les cafés artistiques et littéraires de Paris* (1882), pp. 61–4, 78–9, 155; Robert Courtine, *La vie parisienne: Cafés et restaurants des boulevards, 1814–1914* (1984), p. 267.
36. Forni, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 41–51; Henry Bauer, *Mémoires d'un jeune homme* (1895), pp. 89–92.
 37. Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 33–5; Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864–1892* (Berkeley, CA, 1981), p. 33.
 38. Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 33–48; Maurice Choury, *Les damnés de la terre, 1871* (1970), p. 80; Forni, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 20, 77; Prolès, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 18–22, 28.
 39. Jean Renoir, *Pierre-Auguste Renoir, mon père* (1981), pp. 143–4.
 40. Forni, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 16–17; Prolès, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 25–6; Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 42–8.
 41. Dalotel, Alain, Alain Faure and Jean-Claude Freiermuth, *Aux origines de la Commune: le mouvement des réunions publics à Paris, 1868–70* (1980).
 42. Edwards, Stewart, p. 30; Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire d'un trente sous (1870–1871)* (1891), pp. 14–15.
 43. Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 36.

1 War and the Collapse of the Empire

1. Geoffrey Warwo, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–71* (New York, 2003), p. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
3. Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870–71* (New York, 1965), p. 62.
4. Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris, 1871* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 13–14.
5. Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 66; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 13–15.
6. Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War* (London, 1961), pp. 40–71; Warwo, *The Franco-Prussian War*, pp. 46–64, 74–80.
7. Warwo, *The Franco-Prussian War*, pp. 67–8, 85–91.
8. Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 72. Trochu's warning came on August 10.
9. Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 47–8; Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, pp. 71–4. Eudes was subsequently condemned to death for his part, but was instead sent to prison.
10. Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, pp. 67–70; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 15–21.
11. Pascal Chambon, '1871, la fin de la Garde nationale', in Claude Latta, ed., *La Commune de 1871: L'événement les hommes et la mémoire* (Saint-Etienne, 2004), p. 79; Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London 1997), p. 46.
12. Stéphane Rials, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris de Trochu à Thiers 1870–1873* (1985), p. 55.
13. Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Bloomington, IN, 2004), pp. 19–21.
14. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire d'un trente sous (1870–1871)* (1891), pp. 27–30, 33, 45–9.
15. This account draws on Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 56–69.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 69. The republic had already been proclaimed in Lyon and Marseille.
17. Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 59–60.
18. Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 84; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, p. 73. Napoleon III died in exile in England in January 1873.
19. Luc Willette, *Raoul Rigault, 25 ans, Communard, chef de police* (1984), pp. 52–8; Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864–1892* (Berkeley, CA, 1981), pp. 33–4.
20. Gérard Dittmar, *Belleville de l'Annexion à la Commune* (2007), p. 57; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 87; Odile Krakovitch, 'Les femmes de Montmartre et Clemenceau

- durant le siège de Paris: de l'action sociale à l'action politique', in Latta, ed., *La Commune de 1871*, pp. 43–58.
21. Jacques Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871* (1971), p. 74; Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition*, pp. 55, 64.
 22. See Robert Tombs's excellent analysis in *The Paris Commune*, pp. 73–7.
 23. Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, p. 54; Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 56.
 24. Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, pp. 286–8; Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, pp. 140–6.
 25. Villiers du Terrage, Baron Marc de, *Histoire des clubs de femmes et des Légions d'Amazones 1793–1848–1871* (1910), pp. 383–6.
 26. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, pp. 75–7, 201–9.
 27. Ibid.; Martin Phillip Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organisations in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), pp. 29–34; Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 60–4. Louis Blanc and Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, important personages in 1848, were also there.
 28. Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 52, 73; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 75–6.
 29. Horne, *The Fall of Paris* (New York, 2007 edition), pp. 131–4.
 30. Ibid., pp. 220–4.
 31. Jean Dubois, *À travers les oeuvres des écrivains, les revues et les journaux: Vocabulaire politique et social en France de 1869 à 1872* (1962), pp. 179–80.
 32. Maurice Choury, *Les damnés de la terre, 1871* (1970), p. 36; Dittmar, *Belleville*, pp. 188–9, 199–200, 206; Dubois, *À travers les oeuvres*, p. 265; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 73.
 33. Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 59; Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 68–70.
 34. Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 60. The commanders of thirty-five National Guard battalions attempted to generate resistance to German armies, but to no avail.
 35. Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, pp. 55–64.
 36. Pierre Lévêque, 'Les courants politiques de la Commune de Paris', in Latta, ed., *La Commune de 1871*, p. 33; Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 62.
 37. Maurice Reclus, *Monsieur Thiers* (1929), pp. 12–25, 53; Camille de Meaux, *Souvenirs politiques, 1871–1877* (1905), p. 48.
 38. Joseph-Alfred Foulon, *Histoire de la vie et des oeuvres de Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris* (1889), p. 509; Joseph Abel Guillermin, *Vie de Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris, mis à mort en haine de la foi le 24 mai 1871* (1888), p. 313.
 39. Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, p. 21; Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, pp. 68–70.
 40. Robert Tombs, 'L'année terrible, 1870–71', *Historical Journal* 35:3 (1992), p. 717–18; Bernard Accoyer, ed., *De l'Empire à la République: les comités secrets au Parlement, 1870–1871* (2011), pp. 33–8.
 41. Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2001), pp. 174–5. Thiers famously said that the republic 'will be conservative or it will not be'.
 42. Quentin Deluermoz, *Policiers dans la Ville: La Construction d'un ordre public à Paris 1854–1914* (2012), pp. 151–3; Denis Arthur Bingham, *Recollections of Paris*, vol. 2 (London, 1896), p. 19.
 43. Dale Lothrop Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens! The National Guard in the Paris Commune of 1871' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tennessee, 1975), p. 116.
 44. Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens!', p. 125; Pierre Guiral, *Adolphe Thiers* (1986), pp. 376, 393; Jules Simon, *The Government of M. Thiers*, vol. 1 (New York, 1879), p. 291.
 45. Jean-François Lecaillon, ed., *La Commune de Paris racontée par les Parisiens* (2009), p. 19; Tombs, 'L'année terrible', pp. 719–21.
 46. Maxime Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (1971) p. 158.
 47. Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 118–19.
 48. Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 66.
 49. Adolphe Thiers, *Memoirs of M. Thiers 1870–1873* (New York, 1973), pp. 121, 136.
 50. Jules Simon, *The Government of M. Thiers*, vol. 1 (New York, 1879), pp. 286–90.

51. De Meaux, *Souvenirs politiques*, pp. 43–5; Léonce Dupont, *Souvenirs de Versailles pendant la Commune* (1881), p. 21; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 166; Maurice Garçon, 'Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris', *Revue de Paris* 12 (December 1955), p. 26.
52. Dupont, *Souvenirs de Versailles*, pp. 85–90, 110–11; Hector Pessard, *Mes petits papiers, 1871–73* (1887), pp. 11, 40–2.

2 The Birth of the Commune

1. Dale Lothrop Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens! The National Guard in the Paris Commune of 1871' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tennessee, 1975), p. 125; Pierre Guiral, *Adolphe Thiers* (1986), pp. 376, 393; Jules Simon, *The Government of M. Thiers*, vol. 1 (New York, 1879), p. 291.
2. Jean-Claude Freiermuth, 'L'armée et l'ordre en 1870–71: le cas Vinoy', in Philippe Vigier et al., eds., *Maintien de l'ordre et police en France et en Europe au XIXe siècle* (1987), pp. 42–7; Elihu Benjamin Washburne, *Franco-German War and Insurrection of the Commune: Correspondence of E. B. Washburne* (Washington, DC, 1878).
3. Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens!', pp. 119–127; Phillip Martin Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organisations in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), pp. 2–3, 277–9; Jean Baronnet, ed., *Enquête sur la Commune de Paris (La Revue Blanche)* (2011), p. 93; Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 129; Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 39–43.
4. Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 137–40; Stéphane Rials, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris de Trochu à Thiers 1870–1873* (1985), pp. 251–2.
5. Gay Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris* (Ithaca, 1996), p. 25.
6. Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 43–4.
7. François du Barail (Général), *Mes souvenirs*, vol. 3 (1898), pp. 246–7.
8. Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards of Paris, 1871* (Ithaca, NY, 1973), pp. 56–62.
9. Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 140.
10. Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Bloomington, IN, 2004), p. 22; Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 25–8; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 137–9.
11. Edith Thomas, *Louise Michel* (1980), pp. 21, 77–8, 87–8; Louise Michel, Lowry Bullitt and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter, *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel* (Alabama, 1981); William Serman, *La Commune de Paris* (1986), p. 290; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, pp. 2–3, 22, 48–9.
12. Edwards, *The Communards*, pp. 62–3; Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire d'un trente sous* (1891), p. 225.
13. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 35–6; Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards*, pp. 63–5.
14. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, p. 43; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 46–7.
15. Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 137–42.
16. Jacques Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871* (1988), p. 53; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 255–6; Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens!', pp. 145–63; Eugène Varlin, *Pratique militante et écrits d'un ouvrier communard*, ed. Paule Lejeune (1977), p. 155; Benoît Malon, *La Troisième défaite du prolétariat français* (Neuchâtel, 1871), p. 74; Michel, Bullitt and Gunter, *The Red Virgin*, pp. 64–5.
17. Adolphe Thiers, *Déposition de M. Thiers sur le dix-huit mars* (1871), pp. 33–3; Quentin Deluermoz, *Policiers dans la Ville: La Construction d'un ordre public à Paris 1854–1914* (2012), pp. 141–4, 154–5; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 148–50; Philippe Riviale, *Sur la Commune: Cerises de sang* (2003), p. 194.
18. Jean-François Lecaillon, ed., *La Commune de Paris racontée par les Parisiens* (2009), pp. 38–9; Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, p. 6.
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20. Ernest A. Vizetelly, *My Adventures in the Commune* (n.p., 2009 [1914]), p. 36; Lecaillon, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 37.
21. Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère, 'Un témoin de la Commune de Paris: Eugène Bersier', *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France* 108e (1981), p. 247; J. Rocher, ed., *Lettres de communards et de militants de la Première Internationale à Marx, Engels et autres dans les journées de la Commune de Paris en 1871* (1934), 29 March; Lecaillon, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 39–41.
22. Paul Vignon, *Rien que ce que j'ai vu! Le siège de Paris – la Commune* (1913), pp. 87–92.
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24. Jacques Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871* (1971), p. 114; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 151.
25. Maurice Dommanget, *Blanqui, Guerre de 1870–71 et la Commune* (1947), p. 114; Marcel Cerf, *Édouard Moreau, l'âme du Comité central de la Commune* (1971), p. 11; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 213.
26. Jacques Rougerie, 'Autour de quelques livres étrangers', in Claude Latta, ed., *La Commune de 1871: L'événement les hommes et la mémoire* (Saint-Étienne, 2004), p. 58; Claude Latta, 'Benoît Malon pendant la Commune', in *ibid.*, pp. 112–13; Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communards* (1964), pp. 142–3; Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 359; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 155.
27. Malon, *La troisième défaite*, pp. 93–8; Gaston Da Costa, *Mémoires d'un Communard: la Commune vécue* (2009), pp. 91–8; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 162–4. Louis M. Greenberg, *Sisters of Liberty: Marseille, Lyon, Paris and the Reaction to a Centralised State, 1868–1871* (Cambridge, MA, 1971) seriously underestimates the essential economic and social dimensions of the Commune.
28. Bernard Accoyer, ed., *De l'Empire à la République: les comités secrets au Parlement, 1870–1871* (2011), pp. 54–63, 201, 205, 221, 229; Édouard Lockroy, *La Commune et l'Assemblée* (1871), pp. 26–9, 38.
29. Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 371; Jean Dubois, *À travers les oeuvres des écrivains, les revues et les journaux: Vocabulaire politique et social en France de 1869 à 1872* (1962), pp. 136, 163, 179–80; Adolphe Thiers, *Histoire de la Révolution du 4 septembre et de l'insurrection du 18 mars* (1875), p. 156.
30. Malon, *La troisième défaite*, p. 99; Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2001), p. 30; Gaston Cerfbeer, 'Une nuit de la semaine sanglante', *Revue Hebdomadaire* 25 (23 May 1903), p. 416.
31. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 143–7.
32. Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871*, pp. 128–30, 140; Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France 1780–1880* (New York, 1992), p. 214; Jeanne Gaillard, *Communes de province, commune de Paris 1870–1871* (1971), p. 34; Latta, 'Benoît Malon', p. 114; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, p. 30; David Barry, *Women and Political Insurgency: France in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 108–11.
33. J.P.T. Bury and R.P. Tombs, *Thiers – A Political Life* (London, 1986), p. 200.
34. Philip Nord, 'The Party of Conciliation and the Paris Commune.' *French Historical Studies* 15:1 (1987), pp. 5, 9–12.
35. Rougerie, *Procès des Communards*, pp. 147–51.
36. Sébastien Commissaire, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, vol. 2 (1888), pp. 369–70; Jean Dautry and Lucien Scheler, *Le comité central républicain des vingt arrondissements de Paris (septembre 1870–mai 1871), d'après les papiers inédits de Constant Martin et les sources imprimées* (1960), pp. 236–8.
37. Edwards, *The Communards*, pp. 69–71, and *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 173; Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, p. 21. There were probably about 1,000 members of the International in Paris.
38. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 82–3; Paul Reclus, *Les frères Élie et Élisée Reclus* (1964), pp. 161–81, 188; Rougerie, *Procès des Communards*, pp. 217–22; Edwards, *The*

- Paris Commune*, pp. 11–14; see Eugene Schulkind, 'The Activity of Popular Organizations During the Paris Commune of 1871', *French Historical Studies* 4 (1960), p. 408.
39. Louis Barron, *Sous la drapeau rouge* (1889), p. 2.
 40. Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 283–9; Luc Willette, *Raoul Rigault: 25 ans, communard, chef de la police* (1984), pp. 93–4.
 41. Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 303–7; Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 100–1; Alain Dalotel, *Gabriel Ranvier, le Christ de Belleville: Blanquiste, Franc-maçon, Communard et Maire du XXe arrondissement* (2005), pp. 29–44; Maxime Jourdan, *Le cri de peuple* (2005), pp. 63–74, esp. 22 February.
 42. Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, pp. 6, 93–108; Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens!', p. 188; Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, p. 7.
 43. R.D. Price, 'Ideology and Motivation in the Paris Commune of 1871', *Historical Journal* 15 (1972), p. 76; Edwards, *The Communards*, pp. 78–9; Camille Pelletan, *Questions d'histoire: Le Comité central et la Commune* (1879), p. 51; Jules Andrieu, 'The Paris Commune: A Chapter Towards its Theory and History', *Fortnightly* 10 (new series, November 1871), p. 597.
 44. Jourdan, *Le cri du peuple*, p. 107 (30 March); Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871* (New York, 1976), p. 128; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 186.
 45. Da Costa, *Mémoires d'un Communard*, p. 109; Georges Bourgin, *La Commune de Paris* (1971), pp. 31–2, 40; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 320–2; Malon, *La troisième défaite*, p. 130. A by-election took place on 16 April to replace the thirty-one men who had resigned, been elected from several *arrondissements*, been killed in early fighting, or, as in the case of Blanqui, were in prison. These elections, which had a low turnout, increased the number of radicals in the Commune (Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2010), pp. 45–51).
 46. Varlin, *Pratique militant*, p. 164; Adolphe Thiers, *Notes et souvenirs de M. Thiers 1870–1873* (1903), p. 145; Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, p. 72.
 47. Riviale, *Sur la Commune*, p. 217; Paul Lidsky, *Les écrivains contre la Commune* (1970), p. 69; Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, pp. 224; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 190–1; Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens!', p. 164; Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2010), p. 82; Maxime Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (1971), pp. 286–92.
 48. Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London, 1997), pp. 80–3.
 49. Rougerie, *Procès des Communards*, pp. 160–1, 241. Rougerie insists that these two conceptions of the Commune were not necessarily always contradictory, and that the influence of Proudhon on the Commune has been exaggerated. From 20 April, the Executive Commission consisted of the delegates of the nine commissions as elected.
 50. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 235–6; Varlin, *Pratique militante*, pp. 169–70.
 51. Wickham Hoffman, *Camp, Court, and Siege: A Narrative of Personal Adventure and Observation during Two Wars, 1861–1865, 1870–71* (New York, 1877), p. 252; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, p. 345; Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871*, p. 187; Rocher, *Lettres de Communards*; E. Tersen, 'Léo Frankel', *Europe, revue mensuelle*, 29:64–5 (April–May, 1951), pp. 157–8.
 52. Bury and Tombs, *Thiers*, p. 203. The other challenges were to prevent Bismarck and the newly unified German empire from taking advantage of the provisional government's difficult situation. The third was to maintain support in the provinces, particularly in major centres of republicanism such as Lyon and Marseille. See Louis M. Greenberg, *Sisters of Liberty: Marseille, Lyon, Paris and the Reaction to a Centralised State, 1868–1871* (Cambridge, MA, 1971).
 53. Godineau, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 178.
 54. William Serman, *Les officiers français dans la nation* (1982), pp. 15–18, 54; William Serman, *Les origines des officiers français 1848–1870* (1979), pp. 4–6.

55. Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 100–23; Simon, *The Government of M. Thiers*, p. 290; Riviale, *Sur la Commune*, p. 236.
56. Jacques Silvestre de Sacy, *Le Maréchal de Mac-Mahon* (1960), p. 255; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 91, 96–100; Gabriel de Broglie, *Mac-Mahon* (2000), p. 175.
57. Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 126–7.
58. Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens!', pp. 106–7; Rougerie, *Procès des Communards*, pp. 256–70.
59. 8J conseil de guerre 3 dossier 571, Gustave Cluseret, order of 16 April, court-martial session 17 April; Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, p. 54; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 326–7, 459; Jules Bourelly (Général), *Le ministère de la Guerre sous la Commune* (n.d.), p. 84; Clifford, 'Aux armes citoyens!', pp. 197–8.
60. 8J conseil de guerre 3 dossier 571, Gustave Cluseret, orders 16, 21 and 23 April; Da Costa, *Mémoires d'un Communard*, pp. 203–8; Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, pp. 117, 132; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 326–7, 199–218; Pascal Chambon, '1871, la fin de la Garde nationale', in Claude Latta, ed., *La Commune de 1871* (Saint-Etienne, 2004), pp. 81–3. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray estimated the number at 100,000 men for active duty and another 103,500 for 'sedentary' activity, including manning the ramparts and the 200 available cannons.
61. John Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune* (London, 1871), p. 208.
62. Bury and Tombs, *Thiers*, p. 203; Thiers, *Déposition*, p. 53; Thiers, *Notes et souvenirs*, pp. 162–5.
63. Louis Thomas, *Le Général de Gallifet (1830–1909)* (1941), p. 92; Albert de Mun (Count), 'Gallifet', *Écho de Paris*, 10 July 1909; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, p. 79; Simon, *The Government*, p. 363; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 192–4. In the wake of the first encounter, Rossel found himself arrested and in prison for one night, reasons for which are not clear.
64. Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 196; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, p. 79; A. Balland, *La Guerre de 1870 et la Commune* (Bourg-en-Bresse, 1916), pp. 151–2.
65. Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, p. 262.
66. Godelier (Colonel), 'La guerre de 1870 et la Commune: journal d'un officier d'état-major', *Nouvelle revue rétrospective* 17 (July–December 1902), pp. 18–20.
67. Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune*, p. 85; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 262–3.
68. Jean-Pierre Bénéytou, *Vinoy: Général du Second Empire* (2003), p. 182; Charles Prolès, *G. Flourens* (1898), p. 89; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 85–6; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 199–200.
69. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, pp. 243–64. 8J conseil de guerre 3 dossier 571, Gustave Cluseret, copies of dispatches.
70. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, pp. 264–73.
71. Edwards, ed., *The Communards*, pp. 142–3.

3 Masters of Their Own Lives

1. Ernest A. Vizetelly, *My Adventures in the Commune* (n.p., 2009 [1914]), pp. 95, 136.
2. Louis Barron, *Sous la drapeau rouge* (1889), pp. 112–16; Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2012), pp. 112–14.
3. Albert Boime, *Art and the French Commune: Imagining Paris after War and Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), p. 17; Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, "'Aux citoyennes!": Women, Politics, and the Paris Commune of 1871', *History of European Ideas* 13 (1991), p. 725. Some historians have perhaps overemphasised festive aspects of daily life during the Commune. See Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (New York, 1999), pp. 105–7.
4. John Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune* (London, 1871), p. 128; Stéphane Rials, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris de Trochu à Thiers 1870–1873* (1985), p. 403; Henri Dubief,

- 'Défense de Gustave Courbet par lui-même', *L'Actualité de l'Histoire*, 30 (January–March 1960), p. 32.
5. Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of the Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis, 1988), pp. 136–7; Janine Bouissounouse and Louis de Villefosse, 'La presse parisienne pendant la Commune', *Europe* (April–May 1951), p. 50; Maxime Jourdan, *Le cri du peuple* (2005), pp. 17, 123; Firmin Maillard, *Histoire des journaux publiés à Paris pendant le siège et sous la Commune* (1871), pp. 195–212.
 6. Marcel Cerf, *Les 'Cahiers rouges' de Maxime Vuillaume* (1988), pp. 2–9; Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, pp. 96–8; Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2011), p. 225. In late April Père Duchêne organised an undisciplined battalion of paid *francs-tireurs* known as the 'Enfants du Père Duchêne', which consisted of seventy men, dressed in grey trousers, a red flannel shirt, a jacket and the National Guard *képi*.
 7. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 243–5; Elihu Benjamin Washburne, *Franco-German War and Insurrection of the Commune: Correspondence of E.B. Washburne* (Washington, DC, 1878), 19 May; Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, p. 135.
 8. John Milner, *Art, War, and Revolution in France, 1870–71* (New Haven, CT, 2000), p. 140; Martin Phillip Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organisations in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), p. v.
 9. Maurice Choury, *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!* (1969), p. 96.
 10. Barron, *Sous la drapeau rouge*, pp. 5–8.
 11. APP, Ba 1020, dossier Courbet; Gonzalo J. Sánchez, *Organizing Independence: The Artists' Federation of the Paris Commune and Its Legacy, 1871–1889* (Lincoln, NE, 1997), pp. 57, 65.
 12. Choury, *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!*, pp. 91–4; Sánchez, *Organising Independence*, pp. 43–56; Robert Boudry, 'Courbet et la fédération des artistes', *Europe* 29: 64–5 (April–May 1951), pp. 124–5; Henri Dubief, 'Défense de Gustave Courbet', p. 32.
 13. Gérard Dittmar, *Gustave Courbet et la Commune, le politique* (2007), p. 99.
 14. Paul Reclus, *Les frères Élie et Elisée Reclus* (1964), pp. 181–2, 189.
 15. Sylvie Chevalley, 'La Comédie-française pendant la Commune', *Europe* 48 (November–December 1970), pp. 499–500; Catulle Mendès, *Les 73 jours de la Commune* (1871), p. 182. The Commune issued only one decree on theatres, suppressing 'tout monopole' (all monopolies), dated 1re prairial en 79 (20 May), p. 198; André Tissier, 'Les spectacles pendant la Commune', *Europe* 48 (November–December 1970) p. 180.
 16. Mendès, *Les 73 jours de la Commune*, p. 181.
 17. Guy Tréal, 'La Musique et la Commune', *Europe* 29: 64–5 (April–May 1951), pp. 112–21.
 18. Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, pp. 61, 65.
 19. Ibid., pp. 56, 61, 63, 65; R.D. Price, 'Ideology and Motivation in the Paris Commune of 1871', *Historical Journal* 15 (1972), pp. 80–1; Godineau, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 65.
 20. Luc Willette, *Raoul Rigault, 25 ans, Communard, chef de police* (1984), pp. 96–102; Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 76–81.
 21. Georges Bourgin, *La Commune de Paris* (1971), p. 81; Édith Thomas, *Les pétroleuses* (1963), p. 213; Achille Dalseme, *Histoire des conspirations sous la Commune* (1872), pp. 100, 117.
 22. Adolphe Thiers, *Notes et souvenirs de M. Thiers 1870–1873* (1903), pp. 157–9; Adolphe Thiers, *Memoirs of M. Thiers 1870–1873* (New York, 1973), pp. 138–9; Gaston de Gallifet (Général), 'Mes souvenirs', *Journal des Débats*, 19, 22 and 25 July 1902.
 23. 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6 dossier 29/8 Théophile Ferré; Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire d'un trente sous (1870–1881)* (1891), p. 221; Denis Arthur Bingham, *Recollections of Paris*, vol. 2 (London, 1896), p. 116; Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, p. 210; P.-P. Cattelain, *Mémoires inédits du chef de la sûreté sous la Commune* (1900), pp. 115–20.
 24. Edgar Rodriguès, *Le carnaval rouge* (1872), p. 113; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 26 dossier 535 Gaston Da Costa; W. Pembroke Pettridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871* (New York, 1871), pp. 382–7.

25. Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 122–5; Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune*, p. 387.
26. Gustave Cluseret (Général), *Mémoires du Général Cluseret*, vol. 2 (1887–88), pp. 213–15; Philip M. Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), pp. 51–2; Gaston Da Costa, *Mémoires d'un Communard: la Commune vécue* (2009), p. 245.
27. Cattelain, *Mémoires inédits*, p. 111; Philip Nord, *Les Impressionistes et la politique* (2009), p. 68.
28. Henri Rochefort, *The Adventures of My Life* (London, 1896), p. 391.
29. Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 88–90; Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune, 1870–71* (New York, 1965), p. 367.
30. Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 127–9. Ferré replaced Rigault as Chief Delegate at the Prefecture of Police on 13 May.
31. Pierre Courthion, *Courbet raconté par lui-même et par ses amis*, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1948); Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 154–5; Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 137–8.
32. Frederic Harrison, 'The Revolution and the Commune', *Fortnightly Review*, 53:9 (May 1871), pp. 559, 573.
33. Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communards* (1978), pp. 33–5, 125–34; Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, pp. 99–102; Jacques Rougerie, 'Composition d'une population insurgée', *Mouvement social* 48 (July–September 1964), pp. 34, 46. Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Bloomington, IN, 2004), p. 29. The median age was thirty-two: General Appert, 'Rapport d'ensemble . . . sur les opérations de la justice militaire relatives à l'insurrection de 1871', *Annales de l'Assemblée nationale* 43, du 1er au 17 décembre 1875 (1876), t. 43, p. 117.
34. Rougerie, *La Commune de 1871*, pp. 99–102; Rougerie, 'Composition d'une population insurgée', p. 46.
35. David Shafer, 'Plus que des ambulancières: Women in Articulation and Defence of their Ideals during the Paris Commune', *French History* 7:1 (1993), p. 97; Rougerie, 'Composition d'une population insurgée', pp. 33–46; Appert, 'Rapport d'ensemble', p. 117; William Serman, *La Commune de Paris* (1986), pp. 282–3. Among the professions: masons 2,293; shoemakers 1,491; domestics 1,402; coachmen 1,024; cabinet-makers 1,657; day labourers 2,901; locksmiths/mechanics 2,664; building painters 863, etc.; Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, "'Aux citoyennes!'", pp. 716–19.
36. Wickham Hoffman, *Camp, Court, and Siege: A Narrative of Personal Adventure and Observation during Two Wars, 1861–1865, 1870–71* (New York, 1877), pp. 246, 261.
37. Paul Lidsky, *Les écrivains contre la Commune* (1970), p. 48.
38. George J. Becker, ed., *Paris Under Siege, 1870–71: From the Goncourt Journal* (Ithaca, NY, 1969), p. 263.
39. Price, 'Ideology and Motivation', p. 84; Robert Tombs, 'Prudent Rebels: the 2nd arrondissement during the Paris Commune of 1871', *French History* 5:4 (1991), pp. 393–413.
40. Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 106; Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards of Paris, 1871* (Ithaca, NY, 1973), pp. 81–3; Godineau, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 91–3; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 422–3.
41. Pierre Lévêque, 'Les courants politiques de la Commune de Paris', in Claude Latta, ed., *La Commune de 1871* (Saint-Etienne, 2004), pp. 32–5; Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, pp. 138–44.
42. Edwards, *The Communards*, pp. 127–30.
43. Bourgin, *Commune de Paris*, pp. 55–6; Robert Tombs, 'Harbingers or Entrepreneurs? A Worker's Cooperative during the Paris Commune', *Historical Journal* 27:4 (1984), pp. 970–77. The Association des Ouvriers de la Metallurgie was the other major cooperative.
44. Edwards, *The Communards*, pp. 138–9; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, p. 419; Sébastien Commissaire, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, vol. 2 (1888), pp. 373–4. The salary decree was approved on 21 May.

45. Jacques Rougerie, *Paris libre 1871* (1971), p. 78.
46. Jones and Vergès, “Aux citoyennes!”, pp. 711–13; Gay Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), pp. 122–3; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, p. 1; Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, p. 235.
47. Shafer, ‘*Plus que des ambulancières*’, p. 91.
48. Eugene Schulkind, ‘Socialist Women During the 1871 Paris Commune’, *Past and Present* 106 (February 1985), pp. 133–4; Robert Tombs, ‘Les Communeuses’, *Sociétés et Représentations* 6 (June 1998), p. 54; Jones and Vergès, “Aux citoyennes!”, pp. 716–19; Rougerie, *Procès des Communards*, p. 214.
49. 8J 6e conseil de guerre, 683; Sylvie Braibant, ed., *Elisabeth Dmitrieff* (1993), p. 162; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, p. 29; Godineau, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 153–5; David Barry, *Women and Political Insurgency: France in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 130–1.
50. Jones and Vergès, “Aux citoyennes!”, p. 728; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, pp. 111–15.
51. 8J 6e conseil de guerre, 683; Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 121–5; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, p. 69.
52. 8J 4e conseil de guerre 131, dossier 688; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, pp. 36–7, 63–5, 91–3; Braibant, *Elisabeth Dmitrieff*, pp. 126, 141–2, 146–7.
53. Edwards, *The Communards*, pp. 130–3.
54. Schulkind, ‘Socialist Women’, pp. 136, 154–8, 162; Jones and Vergès, “Aux citoyennes!”, pp. 714–15; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, pp. 69–78, 87. One document suggests that in the Seventh Arrondissement, 365 women were members.
55. Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre*, pp. 15–16, 26, 52–3, 354, 364, 426, 478.
56. René Bidouze, *72 jours qui changèrent la Cité: La Commune de Paris dans l’histoire des services publics* (2001), pp. 7, 88–9, 93, 100–1, 121, 130–1, 144.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–14, 127; Archibald Forbes, ‘What I Saw of the Commune’, *Century Illustrated Magazine* 45:1 (November 1892), p. 66. The Commune’s Commission des Finances oversaw income: Bank of France, 15 million francs; *octrois*, just over 12.2 million; direct taxes, 373,813; industry and tobacco, 2.63 million; stamps and registrations of documents, 800,000; markets, 814,323; railways, 2 million; reimbursements by the National Guard, 1 million; various other revenues, 50,000: money seized, around 6.61 million: total, nearly 41.95 million francs. The Commune spent about 42 million francs, 33 million of which went to the War Delegation, mostly to pay National Guard salaries, or to the arrondissements (Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 90–3; Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 380–2).
58. Rials, *Nouvelle histoire*, pp. 411–13; Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 125–6.
59. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 278; W. Gibson, *Paris During the Commune* (London, 1895), pp. 196, 206–7; Jean-François Lecaillon, ed., *La Commune de Paris racontée par les Parisiens* (2009), p. 112; Choury, *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!*, p. 86; Rougerie, *Procès des Communards*, pp. 197, 206–7; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 36, dossier Fortuné Henry.
60. Paul Martine, *Souvenirs d’insurgé: La Commune de 1871* (1971), pp. 103–5. After the Commune, the ‘*hommes d’ordre*’ declared such marriages null and void; one would have thought such individuals would have been pleased that such people were no longer in *unions libre*, so common among working people, of which they disapproved.
61. Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London, 1971), p. 289 and Chapter 9.
62. Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, pp. 153–5, 171–84; Eugene Schulkind, ‘The Activity of Popular Organizations During the Paris Commune of 1871’, *French Historical Studies* 4 (1960), pp. 400, 408. They were more likely to have had some sort of prior conviction for an offence against ‘public order’, thus a political offence under the Second Empire.
63. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, pp. 274–89.
64. Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, p. 115; Becker, *Paris Under Siege*, pp. 246, 248–50, 258, 265.
65. Jules Bourelly (Général), *Le ministère de la Guerre sous la Commune* (n.d.), p. 243; Mendès, *Les 73 jours*, p. 193.

66. Paul Vignon, *Rien que ce que j'ai vu! Le siège de Paris – la Commune* (1913), pp. 97–100, 114 (Édouard, 22, 24 and 30 March; Paul, 22 and 28 March), 137, 154–5 (Henri, 14 and 19 April).
67. Vignon, *Rien que ce que j'ai vu!*, pp. 184–5 (domestics, 7 May).
68. Ibid., p. 157.
69. Ibid., pp. 109–119, 137, 145–6 (Henri, 10 April; Édouard, 28 and 30 March; Paul, 29 March and 2 and 15 April).
70. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 246.
71. Vignon, *Rien que ce que j'ai vu!*, pp. 121–5 (Édouard and Henri, 4 April).
72. Ibid., pp. 130–3 (Henri, 8 April), 154–5 (Henri, 19 April).
73. Ibid., pp. 190–1 (Henri, 13 May).
74. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 144–7.
75. Washburne, *Franco-German War*, 4, 13, 14, 16 and 20 April.
76. Tombs, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 130–1; Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune*, pp. 215–16.
77. Hoffman, *Camp, Court, and Siege*, p. 260.
78. Vignon, *Rien que ce que j'ai vu!*, pp. 160–72.
79. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, pp. 275–6.
80. Charles Beslay, *Mes souvenirs 1830–1848–1870* (1979), pp. 374–80 (letter of 24 April).
81. Éric Fournier, *Paris en ruines: du Paris haussmannien au Paris communard* (2008), pp. 65–7; Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, pp. 105–6; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6, dossier 29/5 (Gustave Courbet), interrogation, 3 July 1871; Dittmar, *Gustave Courbet*, p. 147; Léonce Dupont, *Souvenirs de Versailles pendant la Commune* (1881), pp. 146–7.
82. Edwards, *The Communards*, p. 134.

4 The Commune Versus the Cross

1. Jean Baronnet, ed. *Enquête sur la Commune de Paris (La Revue Blanche)* (2011), p. 140; Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy (1813–1871)* (2011), p. 144.
2. Joseph-Alfred Foulon, *Histoire de la vie et des oeuvres de Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris* (1889), pp. 1–25; Archives Nationales, F19 2555; Joseph Abel Guillermin, *Vie de Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris, mis à mort en haine de la foi le 24 mai 1871* (1888), p. 13; Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy*, pp. 11–15, 23–4; Jacques-Olivier Boudon, 'Une nomination épiscopale sous le Second Empire: l'abbé Darboy à l'assaut de Paris', *Revue de l'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 39: 3 (1992), p. 467; Archives Nationales, F19 2555; L'Abbé Omer Maurette, *Monseigneur Georges Darboy, archevêque de Paris, sa vie, ses œuvres* (1863); Charles Chauvin, *Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris, otage de la Commune (1813–1871)* (2011), pp. 12–13. A survey undertaken by Monseigneur Pierre-Louis Parisi revealed that between 8 and 16 per cent of men, and more than 60 per cent of women, practised their religion in Haute-Marne (Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy*, p. 18). The demolition of Notre-Dame-du-Fayl-Billot began in 1878, but parishioners expressed sufficient opposition that the choir remains, along with two very small lateral chapels and the sacristy. Élie-Jean-Baptiste was born in 1815 and became a merchant in Nancy; Eugénie married a merchant in Fayl-Billot.
3. Maurette, *Monseigneur Georges Darboy*, pp. 1–11; Lewis C. Price, *Archbishop Darboy and some French Tragedies, 1813–1871* (London, n.d.), p. 144.
4. Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy*, pp. 26–31; Boudon, 'Une nomination épiscopale', pp. 470–2; Jacques Gadille, 'Georges Darboy Archevêque de Paris', *Mélanges offerts à M. le doyen André Latreille* (Lyon, 1972), pp. 187–97. He soon published *Les Femmes de la Bible* and *La Vie des saints illustré, Saint-Augustin*.
5. George Dorboy, *Statistique religieuse du diocèse de Paris: Mémoire sur l'état présent du diocèse* (1856); Boudon, 'Une promotion épiscopale', pp. 474–5; Foulon, *Histoire*, pp. 170–81. On 3 January 1857, Sibour became the second consecutive archbishop of Paris to meet a violent end, stabbed to death by a priest who had been barred from the

- priesthood by the Pope because he was an outspoken opponent of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.
6. Imbert de Saint-Amand, *Deux Victimes de la Commune* (1888), pp. 13–25; Price, *Archbishop Darboy*, p. 146; Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy*, p. 45; Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2011), p. 76.
 7. Archives Nationales, F19 2555, letter of the prefect of Meurthe-et-Moselle, 1 March 1862.
 8. Alexis Pierron, *Mgr Darboy: Esquisses familières* (1872), p. 8; Archives Nationales, F19 1954, Ministre des cultes to Ministre des affaires étrangères, 13 January 1863; Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy*, pp. 41, 64–6, 110–11, 103–4, 117–20. Empress Eugénie, however, strongly supported Deguerry's candidacy. With their son's ascension to his new post, the most important in the French Catholic Church, Darboy's parents began to *vous-vous* him.
 9. Foulon, *Histoire*, pp. 380, 414–21, 430, 435, 616; Anonymous, *La Vérité sur Mgr Darboy* (Gien, 1889), p. 58; Price, *Archbishop Darboy*, p. 145; Pierron, *Mgr Darboy*, p. 191.
 10. Adrien Dansette, *Religious History of Modern France*, vol. 1 (New York, 1961), pp. 303–6; Foulon, *Histoire*, pp. 438–43, 460–5, 501, 505; Price, *Archbishop Darboy*, pp. 125–7; Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy*, pp. 127–37; Chauvin, *Mgr Darboy*, pp. 115, 306. Darboy presided over the funeral of a leading figure among France's Freemasons, seemingly oblivious to the presence of Masonic signs.
 11. Foulon, *Histoire*, p. 509; Guillermin, *Vie de Mgr Darboy*, pp. 313–17; Gustave Gautherot, *Thiers et Mgr Darboy* (1910), pp. 4–6.
 12. Foulon, *Histoire*, pp. 515–22; Gautherot, *Thiers et Mgr Darboy*, pp. 11–12; L'Abbé [Henri-Pierre] Lamazou, *La Place Vendôme et la Roquette* (1876), p. 226; Olivier Marion, 'La vie religieuse pendant la Commune de Paris 1871' (unpublished master's thesis, Paris-X Nanterre, 1981), p. 262. Rigault's inclination was to have Darboy and others shot immediately, in retaliation for the Versaillais execution of Duval and Flourens (Luc Willette, *Raoul Rigault, 25 ans, Communard, chef de police* (1984)), p. 141.
 13. Jean-Baptiste Clément, *La revanche des Communeux* (1886), p. 178; Pierre Vésinier, *History of the Commune of Paris* (1872), p. 309; L.P. Guénin, *Assassinat des otages: Sixième conseil de guerre* (1871), pp. 295–6. An article by Rigault in *La Sociale* accused the clergy of having aided the Prussians.
 14. Paul Perny (R.P.), *Deux mois de prison sous la Commune, suivi de détails authentiques sur l'assassinat de Mgr l'archevêque de Paris* (1871), pp. 35, 38; Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, p. 136; A. Rastoul, *L'Église de Paris sous la Commune*, pp. 25–6, 39, 55–6, 85–6, 117–18; Ernest A. Vizetelly, *My Adventures in the Commune* (n.p., 2009 [1914]), p. 109; Gaston Da Costa, *Mémoires d'un Communard: la Commune vécue* (2009), pp. 158–9; Stéphane Rials, *Nouvelle histoire de Paris de Trochu à Thiers 1870–1873* (1985), p. 450; Marion, 'La vie religieuse', pp. 70–1, counts 148 priests arrested. Thirty-six of sixty-six curés were taken to prison, although some were held only briefly; twenty-five were described as 'in flight'.
 15. Saint-Amand, *Deux Victimes*, p. 83; Antoine-Auguste Vidieu (Abbé), *Histoire de la Commune de Paris en 1871*, vol. 1 (1876), p. 232.
 16. Clément, *La revanche des Communeux*, p. 168.
 17. *Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de 1871*, vol. 1 (1924), pp. 145–8; Willette, *Raoul Rigault*, pp. 109–13, 143–4; Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, pp. 118–19. Willette (*Raoul Rigault*, p. 128) notes that the total number of arrests carried out during the Commune was 3,632. However, this number includes arrests for crimes and misdemeanours – the total number of 'political' arrests, including of those freed quite quickly, was probably no more than several hundred (*ibid.*, p. 129).
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6 Bloody Week Begins

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14. Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, p. 136; Athanase Josué Coquerel fils, *Sous la Commune: Récits et souvenirs d'un Parisien* (1873), pp. 79–80.
15. See Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (New York, 1999), pp. 162, 166–73.
16. Lecaillon, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 168; Laure Godineau, 'Les barricades de mai 1871 chez Jules Vallès (la Commune de Paris, L'Insurgé)', in Alain Corbin et J.-M. Mayeur, *La Barricade* (1997), p. 173; Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2010), pp. 190–1; Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 152–3; Jules Bergeret, *Le 18 mars: Journal Hebdomadaire* (London, 1871), p. 21; Guy Tréal, 'La Musique et la Commune', *Europe*, 29 (April–May 1951), p. 121.
17. George J. Becker, ed., *Paris Under Siege, 1870–71: From the Goncourt Journal* (Ithaca, NY, 1969), pp. 298–9, 300–1.
18. Paul Martine, *Souvenirs d'insurgé. La Commune de 1871* (1971), p. 236.
19. Maurice Garçon, 'Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris', *Revue de Paris*, 12 (December 1955), pp. 28–30.
20. Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune*, pp. 241–2.
21. Ludovic Hans and J.J. Blanc, *Guide à travers les ruines* (1871), p. 17; Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 84–5; Martine, *Souvenirs*, p. 244; Joseph Vinoy (General),

- L'Armistice et la Commune* (1872), pp. 316–17; Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, p. 158; Eugène Delessert, *Épisodes pendant la Commune, souvenirs d'un délégué de la Société de secours aux blessés militaires des armées de terre et de mer* (1872), p. 52.
22. Denis Arthur Bingham, *Recollections of Paris*, vol. 2 (London, 1896), pp. 88–91, 103.
 23. Gaston Cerfbeer, 'Une nuit de la semaine sanglante', *Revue Hebdomadaire* 25 (23 May 1903), p. 416–23.
 24. Lecaillon, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 174.
 25. Vizetelly, *My Adventures*, p. 172; Fournier, *Paris en ruines*, pp. 96–9; Martine, *Souvenirs*, p. 241. The Versaillais were convinced that the Communards, on the verge of defeat, planned to destroy Paris, perhaps turning to science to invent new, terrible weapons. A scientific delegation of the Commune met to consider the development of new, bizarre munitions (Fournier, *Paris en ruines*, pp. 81–8).
 26. Frédéric Fort, *Paris brûlé* (1871), pp. 15–21; Édith Thomas, *Les pétroleuses* (1963), pp. 190–3. Yet, article 14 of the Union des Femmes states, 'Monies that remain will be used . . . to purchase petrol and arms for the *citoyennes* fighting on the barricades.'
 27. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 205–9; David Barry, *Women and Political Insurgency: France in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 127; Thomas, *Les pétroleuses*, pp. 164–6.
 28. Camille Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 111–13; Thomas, *Les pétroleuses*, pp. 190–3 (quote from *Gazette des Tribunaux*, 23 September 1871).
 29. Elihu Benjamin Washburne, *Franco-German War and Insurrection of the Commune: Correspondence of E. B. Washburne* (Washington, DC, 1878), 25 May.
 30. Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune*, pp. 258–9; Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 171–2; François Jourde, *Souvenirs d'un membre de la Commune* (1877), p. 104.
 31. Fournier, *Paris en ruines*, pp. 59, 103.
 32. Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 503; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 325–7; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6 dossier 29/8 Théophile Ferré.
 33. 8J 4e conseil de guerre 131, dossier 688, reports of 29 July and 17, 19, 23, 26 August 1872; renseignements du commissaire de police, n.d.; Fournier, *Paris en ruines*, pp. 43, 52–6, 96–9; Martine, *Souvenirs*, p. 241; Godineau, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 204; 8J 6 dossier 135 Louise Michel, interrogation 3 December 1871; Gustave Lefrançais, *Études sur le mouvement communaliste à Paris, en 1871* (Neuchâtel, 1871), pp. 326–7.
 34. Louis Enault, *Paris brûlé par la Commune* (1871), pp. 4, 150; papiers Eugène Balleyguier (known as) Eugène Loudun (Fidus), Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, ms. 1284, 2e cahier, 'Notes sur la Politique, la littérature, etc. 1870–71'; Fournier, *Paris en ruines*, pp. 112–13, 118–19, 125; Coquerel, *Sous la Commune*, pp. 99–100.
 35. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 354–5, 358–60.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
 37. Paul Lanjalley and Paul Corriez, *Histoire de la révolution du 18 mars* (1871), p. 542; Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, p. 55, n. 1.
 38. A point made by Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 164–5; René Héron de Villefosse, *Les graves heures de la Commune* (1970), p. 252.
 39. André Zeller, *Les hommes de la Commune* (1969), pp. 371–2; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 24–30.
 40. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, p. 35; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 517.
 41. Jacquelynn Baas, 'Edouard Manet and "Civil War"', *Art Journal* 45:1 (Spring 1985), pp. 36–42; Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), p. 170; Philip Nord, *Les Impressionnistes et la Politique* (2009), pp. 54–6, 67–8. Manet's sympathies lay, as in 1848, with ordinary people. Like Courbet, Manet turned down the imperial *legion d'honneur* and his canvas of the execution of 'Emperor' Maximilian in Mexico outraged the Emperor and Bonapartists. The Salon des Refusés of 1863 that launched Impressionism stood as a provocative rejection of imperial artistic tastes, patronage and authoritarianism. Manet

was a republican who hated ‘that little Thiers’, once saying that he hoped one day the ‘demented old man’ would drop dead at the podium. Like Camille Pissarro, Manet castigated the bloody repression even if he had not originally supported the insurrection and had condemned the execution of Generals Lecomte and Thomas.

42. Alphonse Vergès Esboeufs, Vicomte d’, *La Vérité sur le gouvernement de la Défense nationale, la Commune et les Versaillais* (Geneva, 1871), pp. 14–15; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, p. 123.
43. Jean Allemane, *Mémoires d’un Communard* (Paris, 1910), p. 113, noted in Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 331. The devastation is highlighted in Hans and Blanc, *Guide à travers les ruines*, p. 55.
44. John Murray, M.D., ‘Four Days in the Ambulances and Hospitals of Paris Under the Commune’, *British Medical Journal* (January–June 1871), p. 622.
45. Lissagaray, *Les huit jours de mai*, pp. 64–5; Martial Senisse, *Les carnets d’un fédéré, 1871*, ed. J.A. Faucher (1965), p. 139; Henri Ameline, ed., *Enquête parlementaire sur l’insurrection du 18 mars*, vol. 3 (1872), p. 13.
46. Jean Allemane, *Mémoires d’un Communard* (1910), pp. 137–50; Maurice Choury, *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!*, pp. 111–13; Gérard Dittmar, *Gustave Courbet et la Commune, le politique* (Versailles, 2007), pp. 151–2.
47. Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (1971), pp. 236–8.
48. Allemane, *Mémoires*, pp. 161–70, 178–9.
49. Philippe Riviale, *Sur la Commune: Cerises de sang* (2003), p. 300.
50. Roger Gould, ‘Trade Cohesion, Class Unity, and Urban Insurrection: Artisanal Activism in the Paris Commune’, *American Journal of Sociology* 98:4 (January 1993), pp. 721, 728–9, 735–51; Jacques Rougerie, ‘Autour de quelques livres étrangers. Réflexions sur la citoyenneté populaire en 1871’, in *La Commune de 1871: L’événement les hommes et la mémoire*, ed. Claude Latta (Saint-Etienne, 2004), esp. pp. 221–9, 233–5. Gould argues that social relations within neighbourhoods, more than solidarities of work and class consciousness (in contrast, he insists, to 1848), was the most important factor in explaining attachment to the Commune and resistance in its name. In his view, this accounts for the overrepresentation of textile, construction and machine workers and the presence of middle-class neighbours and allies among participants in the Commune. Jacques Rougerie contends that Gould ignores the wider sense of linkage and solidarity formed by work and class experience that developed in the late Second Empire.
51. Barry, *Women and Political Insurgency*, pp. 123–8, 136–9; Jean-Baptiste Clément, *La revanche des Communeux* (1886), p. 159.
52. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire d’un trente sous (1870–1871)* (1891), p. 292; Da Costa, *Mémoires*, pp. 267–9; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 321.
53. Louis Barron, *Sous la drapeau rouge* (1889), pp. 75–81.
54. Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870–71* (1965), p. 443; Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 354.
55. Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 499.
56. Georges Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la Commune révolutionnaire de 1871* (1871), p. 222.
57. Albert Hans, *Souvenirs d’un volontaire versaillais* (1873), pp. 90–1, 97–101; Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune*, p. 251.
58. Marquis de Compiègne, ‘Souvenirs d’un Versaillais pendant le second siège de Paris’, *Le Correspondant*, 10 August 1875.
59. Jourde, *Souvenirs*, p. 73.
60. Martine, *Souvenirs*, p. 231.
61. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871* (New York, 1976), pp. 329, 339; Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 162–3, from *Commissaire*, vol. 3, pp. 374–5. Robert Tombs, ‘Les Communeuses’, *Sociétés et Représentations* (June 1998), p. 55. Tombs argues that the story of a battalion of women is a myth in *The Paris Commune*, p. 139.

62. 8J 4e conseil de guerre 131, dossier 688. Le Mel would deny entering the pharmacy, insisting that they had enough bandages and medications (reports of 29 July and 17, 19, 23 and 26 August 1872; *renseignements du commissaire de police*, n.d.).
63. 8J 6 dossier 135; Edith Thomas, *Louise Michel* (1980), p. 90; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 321–2; Bingham, *Recollections*, p. 108.
64. Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère, 'Journal de l'entrée des troupes versaillaises dans Paris', *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France*, 108 (1981), pp. 301–3.
65. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, pp. 302–10; Lissagaray, *History*, p. 360.
66. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, pp. 327–52. Alcide was sent as a soldier to Algeria and saved, more or less, by having been wounded during the Prussian siege.
67. Hans, *Souvenirs* (1873), pp. 158–9, 172–3; Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire*, p. 320; de Compiègne, 'Souvenirs'.
68. Vinoy, *L'armistice*, pp. 320–1, 341; Lissagaray, *History*, p. 357.
69. 8J 6 dossier 554, 'rapport sur l'affaire', 31 May 1872; Alistair Horne, *The Terrible Year: The Paris Commune, 1871* (London, 2004), p. 129; Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, pp. 328–9.
70. Charles Prolès, *Les hommes de la révolution de 1871*, pp. 114–18; Robert Tombs, 'Paris and the Rural Hordes: An Exploration of Myth and Reality in the French Civil War of 1871', *The Historical Journal*, 29:4 (1986), p. 807.
71. Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 357–8.
72. Bergeret, *Le 18 mars*, pp. 45–8.
73. Edwards, *The Paris Commune*, p. 322; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 518.
74. 'Souvenirs d'un habitant de la Porte Saint-Denis, du 21 au 25 mai 1871', Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville, ms. 1031.
75. Edgar Monteil, *Souvenirs de la Commune, 1871* (1883), pp. 106–13, 121–42. Monteil was condemned to one year in prison and the loss of civic rights for five more.

7 Death Comes for the Archbishop

1. William Serman, *La Commune de Paris* (1986), pp. 499–500. Moreau was condemned to death at Châtelet and shot.
2. Ludovic Hans and J.J. Blanc, *Guide à travers les ruines* (1871), p. 13.
3. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai* (1871), pp. 79–83.
4. Stewart Edwards, ed., *The Communards of Paris, 1871* (London, 1973), p. 161.
5. Paul Martine, *Souvenirs d'insurgé. La Commune de 1871* (1971), pp. 233–4; Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *History of the Paris Commune of 1871* (New York, 1976), p. 348.
6. Georges Bourgin, *La Commune de Paris* (1971), p. 97.
7. Albert Hans, *Souvenirs d'un volontaire versaillais* (1873), pp. 119–122.
8. Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2011), pp. 361–2, 365–6.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 363.
10. Théophile Gautier, *Tableaux de siège de Paris* (1881), p. 113; Maurice Garçon, 'Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris', *Revue de Paris*, 12 (December 1955), p. 31.
11. Georges Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la Commune révolutionnaire de 1871* (1871), p. 267; Ernest A. Vizetelly, *My Adventures in the Commune* (n.p., 2009 [1914]), p. 165.
12. Maxime Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (1971), pp. 8–10, 300–6.
13. Hélène Haudebourg, ed., 'Carnet de guerre d'un Vertarien en 1870 Julien Poirier', *Regards sur Vertou au Fil des Temps* 7 (2003), pp. 11–16.
14. Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2010), p. 197; Éric Fournier, *Paris en ruines: du Paris haussmannien au Paris communard* (2008), pp. 157–8; Camille Pelletan, *La semaine de mai* (1880), pp. 104–5.
15. Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 154–5; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 517; Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 331.

16. Jean Baronnet, ed., *Enquête sur la Commune de Paris (La Revue Blanche)* (2011), pp. 169–70.
17. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 360.
18. Martine, *Souvenirs*, pp. 245–6; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6 dossier 29/8 Théophile Ferré, tribunal report 12 July.
19. Martine, *Souvenirs*, p. 250; Maurice Choury, *La Commune au Quartier latin* (1971), p. 286.
20. Lissagaray, *Les huit jours de mai*, pp. 88–9; Luc Willette, *Raoul Rigault, 25 ans, communard, chef de police* (1984), pp. 158–61.
21. Henri Dabot, *Griffonnages quotidiens d'un bourgeois du quartier latin, du 14 mai 1869 au 2 décembre 1871* (1895), pp. 228–9.
22. Jean Allemane, *Mémoires d'un Communard* (1910), pp. 151–7; Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, pp. 331–2.
23. Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la Commune*, pp. 268, 318–21.
24. Bernard Taithe, *Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil, 1870–1871* (London, 2001), p. 138; Robert Tombs, 'Les Communeuses', *Sociétés et Représentations*, 6 (June 1998), p. 63.
25. 8J 6e conseil de guerre, 213, dossier 189, interrogations of Genton, 6, 12, 16, 24, 29 August 1871; testimony of Jean Costa, 14 August; Romain, 27 July and 16 August.
26. Gaston Da Costa, *Mémoires d'un Communard: la Commune vécue* (2009), pp. 177–81, 191. Earlier that morning, Genton had gone to La Roquette prison on the matter of the incarceration of a troubled carpenter called Greffe, a Blanquist leader who had been arrested for insubordination and was being hidden in the prison apartment of Jean-Baptiste François, director of La Roquette.
27. A6 Ly 140, rapport Alpert, nomination by Committee of Public Safety '25 floréal an 79; 8J 6e conseil de guerre, dossier 189 (Genton); p.v., 5 June and 24 August 1871; Charles Chauvin, *Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris, otage de la Commune (1813–1871)* (2011), p. 144; Ly 137, dossier Jean-Baptiste François; Ly 132, 'Rapport sur l'affaire des nommés Romain, Genton, etc.'; Joseph-Alfred Foulon, *Histoire de la vie et des oeuvres de Mgr. Darboy, archevêque de Paris* (1889), p. 585; L.P. Guénin, *Assassinat des otages. Sixième conseil de guerre* (1871), p. 303; Vuillaume, *Mes cahiers rouges*, p. 73. Jacques-Olivier Boudon (*Monseigneur Darboy (1813–1871)*, pp. 153–4) thinks that no such tribunal was ever constituted. In Da Costa's interpretation, orders for the execution of six hostages arrived at La Roquette but gave no names. Besides those of Darboy and Bonjean, the names on the two lists remain unknown, amid confusing and sometimes contradictory accounts.
28. A6 Ly 137, dossier Jean-Baptiste François.
29. Ferdinand Évrard, *Souvenirs d'un otage de la Commune* (1871), pp. 5–6, 43, 58–64; Joseph-Alfred Foulon, pp. 589–95; Abbé Henri-Pierre Lamazou, *La Place Vendôme et la Roquette* (1876), p. 247; L.P. Guénin, *Assassinat des otages. Sixième conseil de guerre*, p. 303; Sempronius, *Histoire de la Commune de Paris en 1871* (n.d.), pp. 226–7.
30. Guénin, *Assassinat des otages*, pp. 210, 251–2.
31. Alexis Pierron, *Mgr Darboy: Esquisses familières* (1872), pp. 97–9; Guénin, *Assassinat des otages*, p. 303; Joseph Abel Guillermin, *Vie de Mgr Darboy, archevêque de Paris, mis à mort en baine de la foi le 24 mai 1871* (1888), p. 340. Darboy (might have) said to Bonjean seeing the soldiers of Commune on Chemin de ronde, 'Those men there are not the guilty ones – it is Monsieur Thiers!'
32. 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6 dossier 29/8 Théophile Ferré; Guénin, *Assassinat des otages*, pp. 14, 187–8, 303; A6 Ly 132, report; Foulon, *Histoire*, p. 594; Ly 137, Affaire de la rue Haxo; 8J 6e conseil de guerre, 213, dossier 189, interrogations of Genton, 6, 12, 16, 24, 29 August 1871; testimony of Jean Costa, 14 August; Romain, 27 July and 16 August; Lewis C. Price, *Archbishop Darboy and some French Tragedies, 1813–1871* (London, n.d.), p. 290; Guénin, *Assassinat des otages*, pp. 187–8, 303. Several witnesses

attested that they had indeed seen Ferré at La Roquette that day. According to one story, upon seeing Darboy bless the other hostages a member of the execution squad exclaimed, 'So, you are giving a benediction. Well, I will give you mine!' Communards later claimed that Darboy tried to get up three times before being shot again. According to Vuillaume (*Mes Cahiers rouge*, pp. 76–8), Benjamin Sicard commanded the execution squad. Romain, brigadier chef de la Roquette, formally identified Genton as having presided over the execution.

33. A. Rastoul, *L'Église de Paris sous la Commune* (1871), p. 191; Chauvin, *Mgr Darboy*, p. 149.
34. Baronnet, *Enquête*, p. 109; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 503; Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 326.
35. Baronnet, *Enquête*, p. 109; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 503; Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, pp. 319, 326.
36. Woodford McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles: The Russians in the First Internationale and the Paris Commune* (London, 1979), pp. 154–7; Godineau, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 156; 8J 6e conseil de guerre 230 dossier 683, Élisabeth Dmitrieff.

8 The Courts-martial at Work

1. Wickham Hoffman: *Camp, Court, and Siege: A Narrative of Personal Adventure and Observation during Two Wars, 1861–1865, 1870–71* (New York, 1877), pp. 261, 281.
2. Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 177–9; Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai* (1871), p. 75; Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2010), p. 218; Paul Martine, *Souvenirs d'insurgé. La Commune de 1871* (1971), p. 231.
3. René Héron de Villefosse, *Les graves heures de la Commune* (1970), p. 253; William Serman, *La Commune de Paris* (1986), p. 521; Maurice Choury, *Les damnés de la terre, 1871* (1970), p. 151; Camille Pelletan, *La semaine de mai* (1880), pp. 336–7.
4. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 213–27.
5. Henri Dabot, *Griffonnages quotidiens d'un bourgeois du quartier latin, du 14 mai 1869 au 2 décembre 1871* (1895), pp. 222, 227–33.
6. Maurice Garçon, 'Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris', *Revue de Paris*, no. 12 (December 1955), pp. 14–33.
7. 'Souvenirs d'un habitant de la Porte Saint-Denis du 21 au 25 mai 1871', Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville, ms. 1031.
8. Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2011), pp. 366–7.
9. Alix Payen, 'Une ambulancière de la Commune de Paris', in Louis Constant, ed., *Mémoires de femmes, mémoire du peuple* (1979), pp. 86–7.
10. Hélène Haudebourg, ed., 'Carnet de guerre d'un Vertarien en 1870 Julien Poirier', *Regards sur Vertou au Fil des Temps* 7 (2003), pp. 16–17.
11. Charles des Cognets, *Les bretons et la Commune de Paris 1870–1871* (2012), pp. 341–2; Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, p. 267; Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 332–3; Robert Tombs, 'La lutte finale des barricades: spontanéité révolutionnaire et organisation militaire en mai 1871', in *La Barricade*, ed. Alain Corbin and J.-M. Mayeur (1997), pp. 360–4.
12. A6 Ly 132, report: 6e conseil de guerre, affaire du massacre des Dominicains d'Arcueil, rapport du rapporteur, 24 December 1871; Gérard Conte, *Éléments pour une histoire de la Commune dans le XIIIe arrondissement, 5 mars–25 mai 1871* (1981), pp. 78, 90.
13. Haudebourg, 'Carnet de guerre', pp. 15–18.
14. W. Pembroke Fetridge, p. 395; Charles des Cognets, *Les bretons et la Commune de Paris 1870–1871* (2012), p. 342; Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 96–8; Joseph Vinoy (Général), *L'Armistice et la Commune* (1872), pp. 327–8.
15. Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, p. 140. The Prussians held everything between Charenton and Saint-Denis, including all the forts except Vincennes. Tombs describes

the tensions between Bismarck, eager to extend his influence, and the Thiers government (pp. 136–40). The Versaillais entry into Paris removed any possibility of German intervention.

16. Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870–71* (1965), p. 408.
17. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 50–53.
18. Augustine Blanchecotte, *Tablettes d'une femme pendant la Commune* (1872), pp. 200, 204, 211–13.
19. Albert Hans, *Souvenirs d'un volontaire versaillais* (1873), pp. 108–9; Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, p. 167.
20. Hans, *Souvenirs*, pp. 128–38, 141–2, 148–53, 161–71.
21. Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère, 'Journal de l'entrée des troupes versaillaises dans Paris', *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France*, 108 (1981), pp. 301–3.
22. P.F. Borgella, *Justice! Par un officier de l'armée de Paris* (1871), pp. 11, 23.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–4.
24. John Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune* (London, 1871), pp. 262–3.
25. Le Maréchal de Mac-Mahon, *L'Armée de Versailles depuis sa formation jusqu'à la complète pacification de Paris* (1872), p. 40.
26. Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, p. 263; Jules Bergeret, *Le 18 mars: Journal Hebdomadaire* (London, 1871), pp. 11, 86.
27. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 364.

9 Massacre

1. Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2011), p. 368.
2. Paul Martine, *Souvenirs d'insurgé. La Commune de 1871* (1971), p. 270; Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 326; Ernest Vizetelly, *My Adventures in the Commune* (n.p., 2009 [1914]), p. 176.
3. Alain Dalotel, ed., *Émile Maury, Mes Souvenirs sur les événements des années 1870–1871* (2001), p. 74.
4. Benoît Malon, *La troisième défaite du prolétariat français* (Neuchâtel, 1871), p. 473; Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London, 1999), p. 168.
5. Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, pp. 334–5. The previous day Édouard Moreau and two others had proposed reaching out to Thiers in an attempt to arrange a truce, based improbably enough on the Versaillais army abandoning Paris, the dissolution of the National Assembly, and the holding of new elections. Thiers never would have accepted this, and, in any case, there was no way of getting to Versailles (*ibid.*, p. 333).
6. Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 335; Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune 1870–71* (1965), p. 401; Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 157.
7. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Les huit jours de mai derrière les barricades* (1871), pp. 101–2; Vizetelly, *My Adventures in the Commune*, p. 56; Charles Prolès, *Les hommes de la révolution de 1871*, pp. 120–23; Maxime Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (1971), pp. 293–6; Jean Baronnet, ed. *Enquête sur la Commune de Paris (La Revue Blanche)* (2011), pp. 161–6. On 20 June, Vermorel died of his wounds, which the Versaillais left untreated.
8. Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges*, p. 49.
9. Malon, *La troisième défaite*, p. 473; Jean-Pierre Bénétyou, *Vinoy: Général du Second Empire* (2003), pp. 176–83; Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, pp. 186–8.
10. Jacques de La Faye (Marie de Sardent), *Le Général de Ladmirault, 1808–1898* (1901), pp. xii, xxii–xxiii, 281–9.
11. Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, pp. 112–13.
12. William Serman, *Les origines des officiers français 1848–1870* (1979), p. 6; William Serman, *Les officiers français dans la nation* (1982), pp. 55–7, 85–8, 98–9; Robert Tombs, 'Réflexions sur la Semaine sanglante', in Claude Latta, ed., *La Commune de*

- 1871, pp. 238–9; Alexandre Montaudon (Général), *Souvenirs militaires*, vol. 2 (1898–1900), p. 420; Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, pp. 172–6. On 26 May, MacMahon ordered that any Communards offering to surrender should be taken prisoner, and thus not executed (*ibid.*, pp. 185–7).
13. Augustine Blanchecotte, *Tablettes d'une femme pendant la Commune* (1872), pp. 250–2; Jules Bergeret, *Le 18 mars: Journal Hebdomadaire* (London, 1871), p. 11.
 14. Camille Pelletan, *La semaine de mai* (Paris, 1980), pp. 269–75; Louis Thomas, *Le Général de Gallifet (1830–1909)* (1941), pp. 102, 104; Pierre Guiral, *Adolphe Thiers* (1986), p. 402. Benoit Malon titled his Chapter 9 'The Tricolour Terror'.
 15. René Héron de Villefosse, *Les graves heures de la Commune* (1970), pp. 256–7; Jean Bruhat, Jean Dautry and Émile Tersen, *La Commune de 1871* (1970), p. 283. The Ardennais poet Arthur Rimbaud, who sympathised with the *fédérés*, compared oppressed workers to oppressed colonial peoples (Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of the Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, Minneapolis, 1988, pp. 148–9).
 16. Charles de Montrevel, *Nouvelle histoire de la Commune de Paris en 1871* (1885), pp. 204, 208; Gustave de Molinari, *Les clubs rouges pendant le siège de Paris* (1871), pp. x–xxvi.
 17. Anonymous, *Réflexions sur les événements des dix derniers mois par un provincial habitant à Paris* (1871), pp. 19, 48–9.
 18. Jacques Silvestre de Sacy, *Le Maréchal de Mac-Mahon* (1960), pp. 260–61.
 19. Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, p. 186.
 20. *Ibid.*, pp. 186–9.
 21. Edith Thomas, *Louise Michel* (1980), p. 94.
 22. Bruhat, Dautry and Tersen, *La Commune de 1871*, p. 283; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 39, 104; William Serman, *La Commune de Paris* (1986), p. 521; Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, p. 170–1.
 23. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. vii, 2, 6–7, 17, 20–3, 32.
 24. Maurice Choury, *La Commune au Quartier latin* (1971), pp. 163–4; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, p. 191.
 25. Arthur Adamov, *La Commune de Paris 18 mars–28 mai 1871. Anthologie* (1959), pp. 223–4.
 26. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire d'un trente sous* (1891), pp. 312–21; Tristan Rémy, *La Commune à Montmartre: 23 mai 1871* (1970), pp. 64, 86.
 27. Paul Perny (R.P.), *Deux mois de prison sous la Commune, suivi de détails authentiques sur l'assassinat de Mgr l'archevêque de Paris* (1871), p. 197.
 28. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 119–22.
 29. Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 183–5; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 340–1.
 30. Clémence (Adolphe Hippolyte dit Roussel), *De l'antagonisme social, ses causes et ses effets* (Neuchâtel, 1871), pp. 23–4.
 31. Tombs, *The War Against Paris*, pp. 178–82; Maurice Choury, *Les damnés de la terre, 1871* (1970), p. 151 (9 June); Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 522.
 32. Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, p. 161.
 33. Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 508.
 34. Édgar Monteil, *Souvenirs de la Commune, 1871* (1883), pp. 102–7; Charles des Cognets, *Les bretons et la Commune de Paris 1870–1871* (2012), p. 334; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6 dossier 29/8 Théophile Ferré, 24 May; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 306–7; Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 337; Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, p. 159.
 35. W. Pembroke Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871* (New York, 1871), p. 394.
 36. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 369–71; Éric Fournier, *Paris en ruines: du Paris haussmannien au Paris communard* (2008), pp. 92, 96.
 37. Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune*, pp. 445–7; Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 337.
 38. Cognets, *Les bretons et la Commune*, p. 351.

39. Alain Dalotel, *Gabriel Ranvier, Le Christ de Belleville: Blanquiste, Franc-maçon, Communard et Maire du XXe arrondissement* (2005), p. 52; John Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune* (London, 1871), p. 227.
40. Pierre Angrand, 'Un épisode de la répression versaillais. L'affaire Tribels (mai 1871–octobre 1872)', *La Pensée*, 68, July–August 1956, pp. 126–33. Tribels earned a living selling gold and gold objects and dealt in *des valeurs* and *des coupons de rente*. All the valuables had disappeared, undoubtedly into the hands of Vabre and other Versaillais. Madame Tribels later received an indemnity from the French government.
41. George J. Becker, ed., *Paris Under Siege, 1870–71: From the Goncourt Journal* (Ithaca, NY, 1969), pp. 305–8.
42. Bergeret, *Le 18 mars*, pp. 15–16; Malon, *La troisième défaite*, p. 462.
43. Martine, *Souvenirs*, p. 269; Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, pp. 336–7.
44. Blanchecotte, *Tablettes d'une femme*, pp. 249–50; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 515–16; 8J 6e conseil dossier 189, Antoine Romain.
45. A6 Ly 137, Rapport sur l'affaire des nommés . . . ' 23 February 1872; 'Assassinations de la rue Haxo, Pourvois en Cassation', 29 April 1872; interrogation of Antoine Romain, 7 February 1872; Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune*, p. 309.
46. A6 Ly 137, dossier François, interrogation of 3 February 1872; A. Rastoul, *L'Église de Paris sous la Commune* (1871), pp. 220–32; Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communards* (1964), p. 54; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 515–16. Those accused of involvement in the massacre of the prisoners on rue Haxo were workers, mostly from nearby *quartiers*. Six were condemned to death, whereas Romain received fifteen years' hard labour.
47. Rastoul, *L'Église de Paris*, pp. 235–43; Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 410. Rastoul relates, among other items, that Ferré came to La Roquette at about 3.00 p.m. and ordered the remaining prisoners who were serving time for criminal offences to be freed if they would agree to fight against the Versaillais (pp. 239–40).
48. Rastoul, *L'Église de Paris*, pp. 243–56; Perny, *Deux mois de prison sous la Commune*, pp. 227–9; J.-O. Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy (1813–1871)* (2011), p. 153; Robert Tombs, 'Les Communeuses', *Sociétés et Représentations* 6 (June 1998), pp. 60–1.
49. Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune*, pp. 437–41; Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 338; Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, p. 159; Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 411.
50. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 320–7.
51. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 370–1; Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, pp. 165–6.
52. Villefosse, *Les graves heures*, p. 253; Martine, *Souvenirs*, p. 288.
53. Albert Hans, *Souvenirs d'un volontaire versaillais*. 1873, pp. 160–5.
54. Denis Arthur Bingham, *Recollections of Paris*, vol. 2 (London, 1896), p. 110.
55. Archibald Forbes, 'What I Saw of the Paris Commune', *Century Illustrated Magazine* 45: 1 (November 1892), p. 61.
56. Pierre Vésinier, *History of the Commune of Paris* (1872), pp. 312, 325–8, 334. During the June Days, between 1,500 and 3,000 were killed and several hundred were summarily executed.
57. Hans, *Souvenirs*, pp. 187–96.
58. Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 338; Becker, ed., *Paris Under Siege*, p. 313; Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 412.
59. Gérard Dittmar, *Belleville de l'Annexion à la Commune* (2007), p. 76; Hélène Haudebourg, ed., 'Carnet de guerre d'un Vertarien en 1870 Julien Poirier', *Regards sur Vertou au Fil des Temps*, 2003, no. 7 (2003), p. 18. Poirier remained in occupied Paris until September, then returned home to Vertou.
60. Louise Michel, *La Commune, Histoire et Souvenirs* (1970), p. 59; Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 339; Robert Tombs, 'La lutte finale des barricades: spontanéité

- révolutionnaire et organisation militaire en mai 1871', in *La Barricade*, ed. Alain Corbin and J.-M. Mayeur (1997), p. 364.
61. Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, pp. 338–9.
 62. Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 108–10, 129–36; *Les Martyrs de la Seconde Terreur ou Arrestation, Captivité et Martyre de Mgr Darboy, Archevêque de Paris de M. Deguerry* (1871), p. 197.
 63. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 276–82.
 64. Bergeret, *Le 18 mars*, p. 9; W. Gibson, *Paris during the Commune* (London, 1895), pp. 297, 308–9.
 65. Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges*, pp. 14–50, 308–17, 327–57.
 66. Reclus, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 379; Paul Reclus, *Les frères Élie et Élisée Reclus* (1964), p. 189; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 82, dossier 2084. A military court-martial condemned Élie on 6 October 1875 to 'deportation to the confines of a fortified enclosure'. Four years later the condemnation was reduced. Élisée was condemned to deportation on 15 September 1871 to deportation. Élie Reclus was arrested in 1894 at the time of the anarchist attacks in Paris.
 67. Paul Vignon, *Rien que ce que j'ai vu! Le siège de Paris – la Commune* (1913), p. 203.

10 Prisoners of Versailles

1. Anonymous [Davy], *The Insurrection in Paris: Related by an Englishman* (1871), pp. 102–14.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 133, 141–3.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 153–4.
4. John Leighton, *Paris Under the Commune* (London, 1871), p. 266.
5. Arthur de Grandeffe, *Mobiles et Volontaires de la Seine pendant la Guerre et les deux sièges* (1871), pp. 255, 274; Jean Bruhat, Jean Dautry and Émile Tersen, *La Commune de 1871* (1970), p. 283.
6. George J. Becker, ed., *Paris Under Siege, 1870–71: From the Goncourt Journal* (Ithaca, NY, 1969), pp. 306–11.
7. Pierre de Lano (Marc-André Gromier), *La Commune, journal d'un vaincu*, p. 38; Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai* (1871), pp. 122ff; Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 339.
8. Lano, *La Commune*, pp. 39–55, 223; Éric Fournier, *La Commune n'est pas morte: Les usages politiques du presse de 1871 à nos jours* (2013), p. 56.
9. Rupert Christiansen, *Paris Babylon* (New York, 1995), pp. 360–5.
10. William Serman, *La Commune de Paris* (1986), p. 519.
11. Christiansen, *Paris Babylon*, pp. 360–65.
12. David Barry, *Women and Political Insurgency: France in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 143.
13. Léonce Dupont, *Souvenirs de Versailles pendant la Commune* (1881), pp. 93–5.
14. Camille Pelletan, *La semaine de mai* (1880), pp. 265–68.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 282, 288.
16. Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 148–9.
17. Paul Lidsky, *Les écrivains contre la Commune* (1970), p. 75; Robert Tombs, 'How Bloody Was "La Semaine Sanglante" of 1871? A Revision', *The Historical Journal*, 55, 3 (September 2012), p. 33.
18. Gay Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Itaca, NY, 1996), pp. 195–8; Léonce Dupont, *Souvenirs de Versailles pendant la Commune*, pp. 104–6.
19. Louise Michel, Lowry Bullitt and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter, *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel* (Alabama, 1981), pp. 69–73.
20. Susanna Barrows, 'After the Commune: Alcoholism, Temperance, and Literature in the Early Third Republic', in John M. Merriman, ed., *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. John Merriman (1979); and Susanna

- Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven, 1981); Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of the Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis, 1988), p. 148.
21. On rue du Cherche-Midi, a drunken corporal allegedly gunned down a woman standing in front of her store, then a passing dog, then a seven-year-old child, and then another woman (Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 123, 257–62).
 22. Sébastien Commissaire, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, vol. 2 (1888), p. 384; Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, p. 156; Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris, 1871* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 166; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 102–3. In the end, there were 399,823 denunciations.
 23. Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère, 'Journal de l'entrée des troupes versaillaises dans Paris', *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France* 108 (1981), p. 309.
 24. Marcel Cerf, *Édouard Moreau, l'âme du Comité central de la Commune* (1971), p. 207.
 25. Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, p. 343.
 26. Lidsky, *Les Écrivains*, p. 66; Marforio (Louise Lacroix), *Les écharpes rouges: souvenirs de la commune* (1872), p. 96; Woodford McClellan, *Revolutionary Exiles: The Russians in the First Internationale and the Paris Commune* (London, 1979), pp. 167–8.
 27. Bronislas Wolowski, *Dombrowski et Versailles* (Geneva, 1871), pp. 140–42; Denis Arthur Bingham, *Recollections of Paris*, vol. 2 (London, 1896), p. 122; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 130–3.
 28. René Héron de Villefosse, *Les graves heures de la Commune* (1970), p. 253.
 29. Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, p. 129.
 30. Augustine Blanchecotte, *Tablettes d'une femme pendant la Commune* (1872), p. 225; Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 132–33.
 31. Lidsky, *Les Écrivains*, p. 46.
 32. Gautier, *Tableaux de siège*, pp. 242–4.
 33. Henri Oppen de Blowitz, *My Memoirs* (London 1903), p. 40.
 34. Lidsky, *Les écrivains*, pp. 47–8; Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 176–7. Gustave Flaubert, who had served in the National Guard during the Franco-Prussian War, now wrote to George Sand, who was hostile to the Commune, that the latter was 'repugnant' (Michelle Perrot, 'George Sand: une républicaine contre la Commune', in Claude Latta, ed., *La Commune de 1871*, pp. 147, 154).
 35. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 197, 205; Léonce Dupont, *Souvenirs de Versailles pendant la Commune* (1881), pp. 255, 267, 286. Gullickson shows that during the trials at Versailles that followed, the Communards' physical appearance remained almost an obsession.
 36. Marforio, *Les Écharpes Rouges*, pp. 147–52.
 37. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 180–3; Georges Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la Commune révolutionnaire de 1871* (1871), p. 250; Jules Bergeret, *Le 18 mars: Journal Hebdomadaire* (London, 1871), pp. 7–8.
 38. Bruhat, Dautry and Tersen, *La Commune de 1871*, p. 285; Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, p. 169; Maurice Choury, *Les damnés de la terre, 1871* (1970), p. 151; Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 132–3; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 351–8.
 39. Laure Godineau, *La Commune de Paris par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2010), p. 218; Frédéric Fort, *Paris brûlé* (1871), p. 124.
 40. Becker, *Paris Under Siege*, p. 312.
 41. Georges Valance, *Thiers: bourgeois et révolutionnaire* (2007), p. 344; Lidsky, *Les Écrivains*, p. 76; Sébastien Commissaire, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, vol. 2 (1888), p. 383; Bruhat, Dautry and Tersen, *La Commune de 1871*, p. 288.
 42. Louis Énault, *Paris brûlé par la Commune* (1871), p. 266.
 43. Paul Lidsky, ed., *Les aventures de ma vie, Henri Rochefort* (2005), p. 215; Pierre Vésinier, *History of the Commune of Paris* (1872), pp. 344–5; Élie Reclus, *La Commune au jour le jour* (2011), pp. 380–82. H. Sarrepoint (Eugène Hennebert), *Guerre des Communeux de Paris: 18 mars–28 mai 1871* (1871), pp. 363–6.

11 Remembering

1. Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai derrière les barricades* (1871), p. 34.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–9.
3. Georges Bell, *Paris Incendié: Histoire de la Commune de 1871* (1872), section three, ‘Les ruines’; Anonymous [Davy], *The Insurrection in Paris: Related by an Englishman* (1871), pp. 118, 122–59; Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London, 1999), p. 12; Jules Bergeret, *Le 18 mars: Journal Hebdomadaire* (London, 1871), pp. 14–15; Camille Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 301, 344–50.
4. Camille de Meaux, *Souvenirs politiques, 1871–1877* (1905), pp. 54–6.
5. Alexis Pierron, *Mgr Darboy: Esquisses familiales* (1872), pp. 111–12. The new archbishop restored Lagarde to his status as first vicar. Pius IX saluted Darboy in his *Lettre encyclique* of 4 June. The Versaillais shot Vérig at La Roquette immediately upon arrival. Various campaigns to obtain Darboy’s beatification began in the late 1880s and lasted into the late 1960s. A statue of Darboy, sculpted in 1873 by Jean-Marie Bienaimé (Bonassieux), stands in Notre Dame. Streets in the Eleventh Arrondissement were renamed for Darboy and Deguerri.
6. Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Monseigneur Darboy (1813–1871)* (2011), p. 146; Wickham Hoffman, *Camp, Court, and Siege: A Narrative of Personal Adventure and Observation During Two Wars, 1861–1865, 1870–71* (New York, 1877), p. 264.
7. Fournier, *La Commune*, pp. 22–5. The Church of Notre-Dame-des Otages today stands at 81, rue Haxo.
8. Olivier Marion, ‘La vie religieuse pendant la Commune de Paris 1871’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Paris-X Nanterre, 1981), p. 262; John Merriman, *Dynamite Club* (New York, 2009), pp. 88–9; Fournier, *La Commune*, pp. 26–7.
9. Albert Hans, *Souvenirs d’un volontaire versaillais* (1873), pp. 213, 239–40.
10. Hans, *Souvenirs*, pp. 213, 229–32.
11. Henri Ameline, ed., *Enquête parlementaire sur l’insurrection du 18 mars*, vol. 1 (Versailles, 1872), pp. 227–8; René Héron de Villefosse, *Les graves heures de la Commune* (1970), p. 249.
12. Frédéric Chauvaud, ‘L’élimination des traces, l’effacement des marques de la barricade à Paris (1830–1871)’, in Alain Corbin and J.-M. Mayeur, eds., *La Barricade* (1997), pp. 272–79.
13. Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 142–3.
14. Georges Valance, *Thiers: bourgeois et révolutionnaire* (2007), p. 325; Élie Reclus, *La Commune de Paris au jour le jour* (2011), pp. 374–6, 378.
15. William Serman, *La Commune de Paris* (1986), pp. 529–37; 8J 6e conseil de guerre, 683; E. Tersen, ‘Léo Frankel’, *Europe, revue mensuelle*, 29: 64–5 (April–May, 1951), p. 166.
16. Louise Michel, *La Commune, Histoire et Souvenirs* (1970), pp. 328–9; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 536.
17. Sutter-Laumann, *Histoire d’un trente sous (1870–1871)* (1891), pp. 356–7.
18. 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6, dossier 29/5 (Gustave Courbet), reports of 31 May and 1 June 1871 and interrogation of Courbet, 25 July 1871; Eugène Delessert, *Épisodes pendant la Commune, souvenirs d’un délégué de la Société de secours aux blessés militaires des armées de terre et de mer* (1872), p. 51.
19. APP Ba 1020, for example, report of 7 July 1871.
20. 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6, dossier 29/5 (Gustave Courbet), p.v., 8, 13 and 14 June 1871.
21. Pierre Courthion, *Courbet raconté par lui-même et par ses amis*, vol. 1 (Geneva, 1948), pp. 267–9; Gerstle Mack, *Gustave Courbet* (1951), p. 272; Jean Périquier, *La Commune et les artistes: Pottier, Courbet, Vallès, J.B. Clément* (1980), pp. 70–71.
22. 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6, dossier 29/5 (Gustave Courbet); Périquier, *La Commune*, pp. 72–5; Henri Dubief, ‘Défense de Gustave Courbet par lui-même’, *L’Actualité de l’Histoire*, 30 (January–March, 1960), pp. 32–3; Édouard Moriac, *Les conseils de guerre de Versailles* (1871), pp. 95–100, 222–3; Robert Boudry, ‘Courbet et la fédération des

- artistes', *Europe*, 29: 64–5, April–May 1951, p. 126; (Jules) Castagnary, *Gustave Courbet et la Colonne Vendôme: Plaidoyer pour un ami mort* (1883), pp. 2, 77–83. Courbet was fined 323,091 francs for the rebuilding of the column and 6,850 francs for the trial.
23. L. Bigot, *Dossier d'un condamné à mort. Procès de Gustave Maroteau* (1871), p. 163.
 24. Gay Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris* (1996), pp. 206–9; Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven, 1981). Three women, Elisabeth Rétoffe, Joséphine Marchais and Léotine Suétens, were condemned to death, despite a lack of evidence that they had set fire to anything, but they were subsequently spared.
 25. 8J 6 dossier 135 Louise Michel, interrogation 28 June 1871; Louise Michel, Lowry Bullitt and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter, *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel* (Alabama, 1981), pp. 85–6; Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, pp. 210–14; Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, "Aux citoyennes!": Women, Politics, and the Paris Commune of 1871', *History of European Ideas*, 13 (1991), p. 725.
 26. Louis-Nathaniel Rossel, *Rossel's Posthumous Papers* (London, 1872), p. 203; Jules Bourelly (Général), *Le ministère de la Guerre sous la Commune* (n.d.), p. 154; Ly 137; Michel, Bullitt and Gunter, *The Red Virgin*, pp. 77–9; 8J 3e conseil de guerre 6 dossier 29/8 Théophile Ferré, interrogation 16 July 1871; 8J 6 dossier 554; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, pp. 154–5.
 27. Louis Énault, *Paris brûlé par la Commune* (1871), p. 25; Amerline, vol. 1, pp. 127, 243, 264; J.M. Roberts, 'La Commune considérée par la droite, dimensions d'une mythologie', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XIX (April–June 1972), pp. 200–1. Alain Corbin suggests 'it is as if no regime could establish itself firmly until it had proved its capacity to bathe in the blood of the monster: the angry populace, the frenzied mob' (*Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*, Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 98.
 28. Éric Fournier, *La Commune n'est pas morte: Les usages politiques du presse de 1871 à nos jours* (2013), pp. 16–17, 30; François Bournand, *Le clergé pendant la Commune* (1892), p. 10.
 29. Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 191–2; Tristan Rémy, *La Commune à Montmartre: 23 mai 1871* (1970), p. 125. According to another report, the Versaillais forces claimed to have arrested 38,578 people, including 1,054 women and 615 boys and girls under the age of sixteen. Of these, about 20,000 were released without charge and more than 10,000 were condemned to a variety of penalties. Others ended up in well-guarded prison forts in the provinces (Valance, *Thiers*, pp. 344–5; Général Appert, 'Rapport d'ensemble . . . sur les opérations de la justice militaire relatives à l'insurrection de 1871', *Annales de l'Assemblée nationale*, 43 (1875); Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871*, pp. 347–8). By early 1875, the cases of 50,559 prisoners had been heard. Twenty-two courts-martial tried 10,448 people, bringing 13,440 condemnations of which 3,313 *par contumace* between 1871 and 1874; 270 were condemned to death and 26 men were executed; 410 Communards (20 women) were sentenced to *travaux forcés*; 3,989 (16 women) were deported, and 1,269 were sent to prison (Gérard Milhaud, 'De la Calomnie à l'Histoire', *Europe*, 48 (November–December 1970), pp. 42–56). They were not the 'dangerous classes' imagined by elites; yet compared to other workers, they were poorer and, by virtue of the transient nature of their work, arguably less integrated into the city, younger and less likely to be married than other workers, and more likely to be 'illegitimate' (*enfants naturels*) and to be illiterate; 21 per cent had had some sort of encounter with the law but the vast majority of these had involved only quite minor judicial proceedings. Of those condemned, 64.2 per cent were aged 21–40; 25.6 per cent 41–60. Those aged 21–25 were more likely to be deported. Of those arrested, 24.5 per cent were born in the *département* of the Seine (that of Paris). The Seine led the way with 8,938 facing charges, followed by the neighbouring Seine-et-Oise with 1,267. Among the 1,725 foreigners arrested at the end of the Commune, Belgians led the way with 737,

- followed by 215 Italians, 201 Swiss, 154 Dutch and 110 Poles (Appert, 'Rapport d'ensemble', p. 117). The Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Saint-Denis gives a total of 34,952 arrests, including 819 women and 538 children, of whom 2,455 were acquitted with 22,727 cases of charges dropped; 93 people were condemned to death, with 23 executed; 251 were sentenced to hard labour for specific terms or for life; 3,417 were deported to New Caledonia, 1,247 were sentenced to life in prison, and 3,359 received shorter prison terms; 3,313 were condemned in absentia.
30. Arthur Monnanteuil, *Neuf mois de Ponton: Paroles d'un détenu* (1873), pp. 6–9; Maurice Choury, *Les damnés de la terre, 1871* (1970), p. 160.
 31. Louise Michel, *La Commune, Histoire et Souvenirs* (1970), pp. 395ff; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, pp. 531–5. Henri Rochefort and Francis Jourde managed to escape in March 1874, bribing the captain of a British vessel carrying coal to take them to the Australian port of Newcastle, from which they eventually reached Europe (Roger L. Williams, *Henri Rochefort: Prince of the Gutter Press* [New York, 1966], pp. 135–7).
 32. Robert Tombs has argued that fewer Communards perished than has been suggested by other historians – including Tombs himself, who had earlier posited the figure of 10,000 (Robert Tombs, 'Victimes et bourreaux de la Semaine sanglante', in *1848: révolutions et mutations au XIX^e siècle* 1994, pp. 81–96). He argues against Rougerie's contention that outward migration, including the departure of foreigners who could no longer find work and residents who had managed to flee during the siege, can in part explain the precipitous decline of 10,000 in population among workers, particularly in certain radical trades, with the next official census. Tombs estimates the number of those buried within Paris during and right after Bloody Week at 5,700 and 7,400 ('How Bloody was "La Semaine Sanglante" of 1871? A Revision', *The Historical Journal*, 55, 3 September 2012, pp. 679–704). He concludes that Bloody Week was neither 'an act of unprecedented violence' nor as violent as the French Revolution. However, many bodies were not buried until after 30 May, and lime, cremation and mass graves discovered subsequently account for thousands more deaths, which are not totalled in Tombs' new figure of 7,400 executions.
 33. Appert, 'Rapport d'ensemble'; Jacques Rougerie, 'Composition d'une population insurgée: L'Exemple de la Commune', *Mouvement social* 48 (July–September, 1964), p. 32; Camille Pelletan, who was there, figured 30,000, Benoît Malon estimated about 25,000 (Benoît Malon, *La troisième défaite du prolétariat français* [Neuchâtel, FR, 1871], p. 475; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, p. 5); Robert Tombs, 'La lutte finale des barricades', p. 364. Wickham Hoffmann relates that the huge sixteen-foot-deep ditch had been dug in front of Napoléon Gaillard's barricade at place de la Concorde (Hoffman, *Camp, Court, and Siege*, p. 280).
 34. Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 140–3; Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, p. 521.
 35. Rougerie, 'Composition d'une population insurgée', p. 31; Pelletan, *La semaine de mai*, p. 398; Lissagaray, *Les huit journées de mai*, pp. 160–1; Tombs, 'How Bloody Was "La Semaine Sanglante" of 1871?', pp. 13–14.
 36. Maxime Vuillaume, *Mes Cahiers rouges au temps de la Commune* (1971), p. 58; Michel, Bullitt and Gunter, *The Red Virgin*, p. 68; Jean Baronnet, ed., *Enquête sur la Commune de Paris (La Revue Blanche)* (2011), p. 146.
 37. Frederic Harrison, 'The Revolution and the Commune', *Fortnightly Review*, 53:9 (May 1871), pp. 577–8; Jean Allemane, *Mémoires d'un Communard* (1910), p. 136; E. Belfort Bax, Victor Dave and William Morris, *A Short History of the Paris Commune* (London, 1886), pp. 63–5, 72–9. Jacques Rougerie, *Procès des Communards* (1964), p. 7; Peter McPhee, *A Social History of France 1780–1889* (New York, 1992), pp. 214–15. From London, Karl Marx asserted that the Paris Commune was the first socialist revolution in history. He intoned memorably: 'Working-man's Paris, with its Commune, will forever be celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators' history

has already been nailed to the eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them' (Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, Chicago, 1934). Marx concluded that the Paris Commune was not the anticipated social revolution that would free the proletariat. Yet workers had risen up spontaneously, so he was reassured. Lenin would point to the revolutionary role during the Commune of the leadership of the avant-garde of the proletariat. In this he was thinking of the organisation of his own Bolsheviks, thus turning away from an emphasis on the revolutionary spontaneity of ordinary people.

38. Robert Tombs, 'L'année terrible, 1870–71', *Historical Journal*, 35:3 (1992), p. 724, anticipating 'the chilly bureaucratic carnage of the twentieth century'.
39. Henri d'Alméras, *La vie quotidienne pendant le siège et sous la Commune* (n.d.), pp. 514–15.
40. Denis Arthur Bingham, *Recollections of Paris*, vol. 2 (London, 1896), pp. 126–33.
41. Paschal Grousset, Francis Jourde and Henri Brissac, *La bague en Nouvelle-Calédonie ... l'enfer au paradis* (Nouméa, Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2009), p. 13.
42. Malon, *La troisième défaite*; Gustave Lefrançais, *Études sur le mouvement communaliste à Paris, en 1871* (Neuchâtel, 1871). See Fournier, *La Commune*, pp. 32–40, 147–74.
43. Madeleine Réberieux, 'Le Mur des fédérés', in Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1, pp. 619–45. See also Danielle Tartakowsky, 'Le mur des fédérés ou l'apprentissage de la manifestation', *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut de recherches marxistes*, 44 (1991), pp. 70–9, and *Manifester à Paris 1880–2010* (2010).
44. Jules Vallès, *L'Insurgé* (1923).
45. Remy Cazals in Gilbert Larguier and Jérôme Guaretti, eds., *La Commune de 1871: utopie ou modernité?* (Perpignan, 2001), pp. 389–90. Clément wrote '*La Semaine sanglante*' ('Bloody Week') while in hiding in Paris.
46. Jean Varloot, ed., *Les poètes de la Commune* (1951), pp. 95–8.
47. Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward Angel: A Story of the Buried Life* (New York, 1929).

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Illustrations

- 1 Battle on place de la Concorde, by Gustave Boulanger. Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images.
- 2 Defences during the Commune, 1871. © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis.
- 3 Cannons and a barricade erected on Porte Saint-Ouen. © Alinari Archives/Corbis.
- 4 Barricade on rue de Castiglione. © Alinari Archives/Corbis.
- 5 'Summary executions in Paris – Shooting Down Communist Prisoners', *Harper's Weekly*, July 1871.
- 6 The corpses of anonymous Communards executed by the Versailles army. Photo by Roger Viollet Collection/Getty Images.
- 7 Paris aflame, seen from the Solferino bridge, 24 May 1871, lithograph by Léon Sabatier and Albert Adam for *Paris et ses ruines*, 1873.
- 8 The burning of the Hôtel de Ville, 24 May 1871, lithograph by Léon Sabatier and Albert Adam for *Paris et ses ruines*, 1873.
- 9 'The End of the Commune – Execution of a Pétroleuse', *The Graphic*, 10 June 1871.
- 10 Rue de Rivoli after the fighting on 24 May 1871, lithograph by Léon Sabatier and Albert Adam for *Paris et ses ruines*, 1873.
- 11 The Hôtel de Ville after being damaged by fire during the Commune. © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis.
- 12 Execution of the hostages at La Roquette prison on 24 May 1871, lithograph by Jules David. © adoc-photos/Corbis.
- 13 Théâtre de la Porte, May 1871, stereoscopic print by Hippolyte Blancard. Private Collection/Roger-Viollet, Paris/The Bridgeman Art Library.
- 14 Édouard Manet, 'Civil War', 1871. Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University.

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